

*"I should like to see young men made better acquainted with the grand sweep of history and philosophy that underlies it, with the story of great movements and of great causes, of the sublime heights to which the soul of man can rise. Let them read biographies of great men, in which more than anywhere else history ought to be studied*

*Hon'ble Sir MAURICE GWYER  
Chief Justice of India*

# THE IRON DICTATOR

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

OF

GANDHI'S GREATEST GENERAL  
SIRDAR VALLABHAI PATEL

by

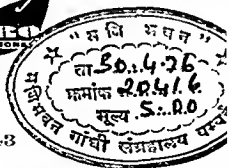
*The author of the "Red Star of the East"*

by

Hiralal Seth



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## PREFACE

In an age of dictatorships of varied political complexions ranging from parliamentary absolutism of Churchill and Roosevelt, to military clique of Germany, the corporate state of Italy, the Samurai feudal lords of Japan and Proletarian rule in Russia, and many more still in embryonic stage—in such an atmosphere we naturally look round at the political scene nearer home and try to find out the nearest approach to a modern dictator we had in India in recent years. The name of Vallabhai Patel, the man who was responsible for organising the Congress Parliamentary machine, and preparing it for several struggles with the bureaucracy, at once suggests itself to mind. Time and again he has wielded a strong hand in the Congress both to purge it of undesirable elements and to translate the ideas of Gandhi into action. He may be described as Gandhi's general though he has not always found it possible to accept all the shibboleths of non violence. He has interpreted Gandhian policy according to the instincts of a born soldier and an organiser without any sentimentalism and with his eyes on its ultimate results. He has often ridden roughshod over wishes of others, and said and done things with which many would disagree. But our understanding of his views becomes easier if we remember that he came into

prominence in a decade in which democracy had been discredited everywhere. This book attempts to deal with life of Vallabhai Patel, not only as a nationalist and a foremost leader but also as a representative of the spirit of dictatorship in our age. It is only by viewing him in a historical background that we can take an impartial view of his stormy career.

This seems to be imperative at a time when India has launched her struggle for freedom and the greatest need of the hour is solidarity and forgetting of past frictions and internecine warfare

Lahore  
2-2-1943

HIRA LAL SETH

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SOLDIER

Gujarat, the land of birth of Gandhi as well as Patel, was the first to learn the lesson of Satyagrah. When Gandhi returned from South Africa, Gujarat was passing through a political as well as economic slump. In the year 1918 there was famine in Bombay Presidency and Gujarat District ; and this resulted in failure of crops. The peasants wanted a suspension of the assessment. They petitioned to the Government and explored all the avenues of peaceful settlement. When these efforts failed, Gandhi tried the weapon of Satyagrah which he had perfected in South Africa. He achieved a great measure of success. Few great men have had such initial success in the land of their birth. Hitler could not convert Austria to Nazism till he had assumed and consolidated power. Up to 1938, he could only look wistfully across the frontier and yearn for the day when he could be strong enough to force Austria to follow his political philosophy. Stalin was born in Georgia, but it were not the Georgians who accepted his political philosophy first, it were the workers of Petrograd and Moscow who acknowledged his leadership. Marx, in his life-time dreamed about communist revolution coming first in Germany but it was only after his death that German Social Democratic Party became a formid-

able force , although Germany was not the first country to undergo a communist revolution Gandhi, however has been more fortunate in this respect than Marx, Hitler or Stalin

Several factors contributed to his success, one was Psychological , the people of Gujerat had been so much demoralised and depressed by famine, that this weapon of passive resistance appealed to them , and they thought it a heaven sent opportunity to redress their grievances The other was the fact that Gujerat, of all provinces, in India, has been least wedded to the doctrine of sword In times preceding the British rule whenever there has been a foreign invasion or internal struggle, Gujerat has not played any prominent part in these upheavals Since the British rule too, violent outbreaks have been rare But the of Gujrati's are in spite of it, a tough and stubborn people, as was shown in their struggle during the Satyagrah in 1918, 1921 and 1928 Centuries of suppressed instinct of fighting can alone account for such a phenomenon as Bardoli and such men as Vallabhai Patel

The name of Vallabhai Patel brings us to the third factor contributing to success of Gandhi Patel was a young barrister of thirty years, when Gandhi appealed for volunteers in connection with Gujerat Satyagrah He had just come back from England and settled down at Ahmedabad Vallabhai who had been at school a 'backward son', and very rebellious in temper, had in course of his stay in England learned to work hard and to take life seriously His work as a



lawyer interested him most and after that the life at Ahmedabad Club, where he spent his leisure hours in company of his fellow lawyers and other members of town aristocracy. It was there that Gandhi converted him. Patel left the bar and joined Gandhi as a volunteer for educating the peasants in villages. Along with Gandhi he visited villages encouraging the peasants, who took vow not to pay taxes even if their property was confiscated. For the first time in their lives the peasants learned to default on their payments.

When the Government saw Satyagrah spreading far they agreed to suspend assessments in case of poor peasants, but fearing a loss of face they did not declare openly that they were going to practise such a scheme. It was a defeat without formal admission of it, a defeat which many members of British ruling class, apart from Mr Chamberlain (the Munich Man), are capable of swallowing with equanimity and assuming a look of the victor rather than the vanquished.

Apart from agrarian matters in Gujerat, Gandhi successfully intervened in the great strike of Ahmedabad labourers in 1918. Patel collaborated with him. At first the mill owners stood their ground but when Gandhi resorted to fast they capitulated and agreed to 35% increase of workers' wages. To Patel this experience of contact with the Ahmedabad working class, proved of immense use in latter days when he was able to knit together the Ahmadabad workers and form a trade union of theirs on Gandhian model.

The year 1919 opened with a massacre at Jallianwala Bagh. This spilling of innocent blood immediately after the holocaust of 1914—18 showed that man had not learned any lesson from that grim tragedy, and that there were still people who could be capable of suppression of rights of other nations and other races. Versailles and Amritsar stand out as the blackest spots of three centuries of British domination over the major part of globe. It was not mere coincidence that these two most ghastly tragedies of all times occurred the same year. It showed that British Imperialism had become so much blood thirsty after victory over Germany with American money and Indian man-power that it was not satisfied with imposing its will on a helpless nation but also wanted to rule with brute force over its former comrade-in-arms. In a word Amritsar tragedy was as crude an exhibition of racial superiority as Versailles was of National pride. The latter was one of the causes of this war. The former alienated India from Britain, and was the immediate cause of launching of Gandhi's Non-co-operation movement in 1920-21.

Before the start of this campaign a Congress session was held in which the situation was to be considered.

Ahmedabad, which had figured prominently in Gandhi's early campaign at Satyagrah, was selected as venue of the Congress Session. Hakim Ajmal Khan

was the President and Vallabhai Patel chairman of the reception committee. The reception arrangements had a typical Patel touch of simplicity. The tents were made of khaddar Benches and chairs for delegates were absent. Patel spoke briefly welcoming the President and assuring him about loyal support of his province in the future programme of Congress. The Ahmedabad Session may be described as a meeting of the war council while the operations are still going on and the war chiefs in order to review the results of the preliminary attack sit together and consult each other. Gandhi was all for mass civil disobedience and favoured Bardoli as the place from which to start his campaign. The people of Bardoli were ready for a fight. They had called a Bardoli Taluka conference and decided to ask the Working Committee to start mass struggle from that place. The Working Committee congratulated them and approved of their resolution. Gandhi as is his wont wrote a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Reading, informing him about his intentions to start a campaign. Patel was to lead that campaign. But the happenings at Chaura Chauri prevented the opening of this second front and so much was Gandhi moved by this ghastly tragedy that he decided to call off not only the Bardoli campaign but also the entire Non-co-operation movement.

### (3)

After the abrupt ending of non co-operation, there was division in Congress ranks over the Council entry

issue Two groups were formed at Gaya—one under C R Dass and the Elder Nehru favouring Council entry and the other of no changers, who wished to follow Gandhian programme This group was led by Rajagopalcharia and Vallabhai Patel The crisis became acute at Bombay meeting of the A I C C on May 27, 1923 Rajaji and others submitted a report to Working committee about the constructive programme of Congress Rajaji wanted that side by side with Council entry programme constructive work should also be continued The Working Committee dropped the programme of Rajaji as inconsistent with Gaya Congress resolution The A I C C decided against any propaganda about boycott of Councils among the voters Patel, Rajaji and other Gandhites resigned from Working Committee The resignations were accepted and the Working Committee was reconstituted The President also resigned

A settlement was reached at Delhi between the two groups Vallabhai Patel found it hard to forgive and reluctantly agreed to it The settlement allowed both sides to carry on their activities

Non co-operation had been given up but the mental background of the British or Indians had not changed Here and there trial of strength between the ruler and the ruled continued One such case was the Nagpur Flag Satyagrah The Congress wanted to take out a procession in Nagpur, but the Government insisted on their applying for permission The Congressmen said

they had a right to pass from any place they liked. A struggle seemed inevitable. Volunteers poured from all sides of the country. Both Vithalbai Patel and Vallabhai were in charge of the Satyagrah. Vallabhai did not precipitate matters but sent to the Government the time and route of the march. The Government allowed the procession to pass.

In Bardoli the bureaucracy was retaliating in a queer way. Dacoities were frequently taking place and the Government imposed a punitive police on the people. In other words they behaved exactly as the Germans are doing to-day with Poles and Czechoslovaks. The Germans have their agent provocateurs who start trouble against them in a particular district they wish to suppress. Sometimes the outbursts against Germans are spontaneous, but not infrequently it is the work of provocateurs. The same was being done in Bardoli. Patel went on the spot and established that the bullets and rifles used by the dacoits belonged to Government.

Moreover, photographs were taken by the villagers which proved their case to the hilt.

For some time after these things became publicly known, the punitive police continued to stay, but the old Governor, Lord Llyod, went away and the new Governor opened an enquiry and withdrew the police. This was another triumph for Vallabhai Patel, which won for him a unique position in Gujerat province. He would have continued his work among the peasants longer still, but it seemed for the time being the

Government had relaxed its iron grip over them and it wished to create an atmosphere in which Montague-Chelmsford reforms scheme could be translated into action. The peasants too wanted to consolidate their strength and breathe an air of peace.

This "Peace era" in Indian politics, which lasted from 1924 to 1928, was peaceful in the sense that there was no tussle with the Government. Internecine warfare between Hindus and Muslims was however quite frequent, and could be suppressed only after splendid effort on the part of Congress in promoting inter-communal harmony.

A remarkable feature of this era was the election of almost all the front rank Congress leaders to the office of Mayor or President of Municipal Committees of various cities. C. R. Dass became Mayor of Calcutta, Vithalbhai of Bombay and Vallabhai Patel became President of Ahmedabad Municipality. This office he held till 1928, when he was again called back to Gujerat villages to command the struggle at Bardoli.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GENERAL

In 1928 trouble again flared up in Bardoli. The Government announced that Bardoli was to have periodical resettlement of land after twenty or thirty years and revenue was to be raised by 25%. This was done in face of opposition from the people of Bardoli, who complained that produce was not better. They wanted establishment of an impartial committee to investigate conditions of labour, roads, prices, economic outlook and taxation, and to find out whether any enhancement could be effected. The Government had previously enhanced assessment in Kaira District in 1918. And the result was the struggle which forced it to retrace its steps. Now it was again repeating the same game at Bardoli. These are the tactics that Hitler has successfully followed against Jews in Germany. Whenever the public opinion in foreign countries including England has protested against such measure, Hitler has relaxed them for a while only to introduce them again with increased vigour. British Imperialism, which is older than that of Hitler's Imperialism, has used all those weapons in India, South Africa, Egypt and Palestine, before Hitler used them. But whereas the Jews taxed and expropriated could leave Germany, because their

rich brethren in other countries could help them, and Zionists could provide shelter for them in Palestine, Madagascar, Mexico etc, the peasants of Bardoli, poor, uneducated people, could not leave their beloved cattle and migrate elsewhere. They determined to resist and the result was a prolonged and mighty struggle, which has, alike for its courage and fortitude, few parallels in the history of the world. It may be compared to the Wat Tyler Peasants revolution in England, the struggle of the serfs in Russia during the last century and the stand of the peasants, and miners of Asturias in 1934.

The struggle was carried out under the command of Vallabhai Patel, who advised the peasants not to pay the taxes even if the Government auctioned their land. He said, "Tell Government, you can do what you like, but only by force you shall get us to agree to what we do not like. Cut me to pieces, but I will not pay."

The peasants of Bardoli acted on this advice. They suffered hardships and privations, but they did not yield. The Government employed Pathans to harass them and force them to pay, who indulged in all sorts of indecencies against them. This use of Pathans has a marked resemblance to the Jew-baiting of S S and Gestapo in Germany. It would be no exaggeration to say that the life of Bardoli peasant was hardly different from that of a Jew in a Ghetto in Berlin or Warsaw in our own times. This act becomes all the more repulsive when one realises that the men used by the British Government against Bardoli Kisans were of the same



nationality as the Kisan themselves That these wretched men could swoop so low as to molest their own physically weak country men and women simply for the sake of money shows, how degraded a man can become sometime What exactly the condition of peasants in Bardoli was can be best judged from the following account of Mr Munshi in his book "I Follow the Mahatma" —

"There are 17 000 Khatedars concerned in this matter They and their families go to make about 40 000 buffaloes, which are loved by their owners with an affection, the strength of which can only be appreciated by a born agriculturist In order to save their beloved cattle 40,000 men, women and children with these cattle have locked themselves up in small and insanitary houses for over three months As I passed through villages silent, empty and, deserted with sentinels posted at different ends as I saw women peeping through the barrel window to see whether it was the arrival of the Japti officer, as on being reassured the doors were opened and I was taken inside, as I saw the darkness, the stench, the filth and the men, women and children who had herded for months in the same room with their beloved cattle, miserable, ulcerated, grown whitish by disease and as I heard their determination to remain in that condition for month rather than abandon their cattle to the tender mercies of the Japti officer, I could not help thinking that the imagination which conceived the dire Japti methods, the severity

which had enforced them, and the policy which had sanctioned them were difficult to be found outside the pages of a history of medieval times ”

The tragedy becomes all the more poignant when we remember that these people had to remain inside hurdled together in Monsoon Season, when rain, stink and mud added to the misery of their siege. The struggle in Bardoli had begun in the month of May and it had continued throughout June and July right up to August

During the time this stay-in-strike continued the Government did not stand by passively Lands were confiscated A few instances of such confiscation which have been mentioned by K M Munshi may be quoted here

A man who had to pay assessment of Rs 700 had his land valued at Rs 30,000 forfeited In another case a lot of 33 acres, which could be easily worth Rs 15,000 was sold for Rs 161. Cotton worth Rs 250 was sold for Rs 21 A man failing to pay Rs 360 had his liquor worth Rs 2,000 attached and his shop closed Buffaloes were attached without any enquiry as to their owners

All these measures, and the declaration of the Governor that all the resources of Empire would be used to crush Bardoli struggle only increased the determination of the people for struggle The movement had already received blessings of the Congress Vallabhai Patel represented the Congress His brother Vithal-

bhai, who was President of the Central Assembly, threatened to resign if the Viceroy did not interfere in the Bardoli affair. The Nationalist members of Bombay Legislative Council resigned *en bloc* and formed a committee, which was to go to Bardoli and report on the matter. Mr. Munshi who was also a member of the Council resigned. He saw Patel in action at Bardoli and learned about the immense power wielded by him over the Kisans. He describes Patel in the following words —

“The Sardar had unique experience of civic and public life of the bloody riots of Ahmedabad, of the non violent struggle of Nagpur, of political manoeuvres and the non co-operation of Gandhiji. A seasoned warrior he knew the weakness of the officials as well as the strength of the people. He could make men dance to his tune. His steel had passed through the fire of the alchemist and come out with a finer edge. He had the great general's discerning eye for the true and the loyal, for the enemy, for the traitor and the obstructionist. The art of managing men he knew and knew well. But much as he loved to concentrate power in his hands he invariably submitted to Gandhiji's wishes.

Under his direction the leaders of Gujerat trained in the school of Gandhiji assumed the charge of various positions in accordance with their experience and calibre. He stamped out difference of opinion, discussions and rivalries among them. Different

ashrams were converted into camps, the workers became leaders. The word of the Sardar became the gospel of Bardoli.

"The Sardar moved from village to village and thousands listened to his message with fond devotion. He alone spoke in Bardoli and indeed he could speak. Stern self control characterises Gandhiji's soft speech which turns away wrath, truth and sweet reasonableness are its normal conditions. But the eloquence of his disciple has intensely human elements. He can be truculent. He can attack well and effectively when the need arises. He can demolish or denounce by a withering phrase or a picturesque smile. He can move his audience to laughter or tears by using idioms which go straight to the hearts of villagers. The varying use of linguistic and rhetorical wealth, the ability to deal sledge hammer blows to opponents, the skill to touch the hearts of men or inspire them to action made Sardar Vallabhai's addresses to the Bardoli peasants the high water-mark of eloquence." It would be observed that Patel was the master of situation in Bardoli. The increased tempo of the movement forced the Governor to yield. The Governor offered terms to Patel, which the latter did not consider adequate and consequently rejected. This action of Patel infuriated a section of the Members of Bombay Legislative Council, who had obviously banked on the hope of a speedy termination of the struggle. Gandhi was approached in this matter and he laid down the following terms which were

finally accepted by the Government with minor adjustments.—

- (a) Pending the inquiry, old assessment to be accepted.
- (b) Satyagrahis will call off the campaign simultaneously the pronouncement is made about the inquiry.
- (c) An open judicial inquiry within the terms of the land revenue code by a judicial officer alone or assisted by a revenue officer with terms of reference as given below and under which the people will have a right to lead and test evidence with the help of counsel, if necessary.

Terms of Reference First, to inquire into and report upon the complaint of the people of Batdoli and Valad.

- (a) That the enhancement of revenue recently made is unwarranted in terms of the revenue code
  - (b) That the Reports and Notifications accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong, and
  - (c) to find, if the people's complaint is held to be justified, what enhancement or reduction there should be, upon the old assessment
- Secondly to report upon the allegations made

by or on behalf of the people about coercive measures adopted by the Government in order to collect enhanced revenue.

- (d) All land to be restored.
- (e) Prisoners to be released.
- (f) All talatis and patels to be re-in-stated.
- (g) Valad liquor shopkeepers to be compensated.

It was characteristic of Patel that he did not throw up the sponge and offer the terms to the Government. It was the Government that realised that it could not go on with administration of a province without the support of its people and their representatives in Bombay Legislative Assembly. A court was established under the agreement and it came to the conclusion that the measure of enhancement should be  $6\frac{1}{2}\%$ . This was accepted by both sides and extended to Chorasai District too, which had remained aloof from the movement.

## (2)

Bardoli, Simon Commission and the wave of repression sweeping over the entire country had its repercussions on Calcutta Congress which met in the same year under the Presidentship of Pandit Moti Lal Nehru. The Congress which had been frittering away its strength in Legislatures, received a rude awakening and in face of common danger the internal differences were forgotten. Four or five years'

work inside the Legislatures had enriched the Swatajists in experience and they had begun to realise that they had been led up the garden by the bureaucracy and that the Montague-Chelmsford reforms were utterly hollow. Democratic institutions which had begun to decay in Germany and Austria, and which were subjected to a great strain in France, England and America, could not function very well in India especially when the democracy itself was of a very spurious kind. In the year 1929—32 these institutions in Europe and America faced their two mortal enemies, Capitalism and Fascism, and a grim struggle was witnessed between the two sides, which left fascism astride over the major part of Central Europe, while in England, France and America democracy was adjusted to meet the crisis created by the failure of capitalism. In India there was also a mighty struggle against the British Government in these years and the weak, and spurious democracy of Montague-Chelmsford reforms, which had all the faults of the Weimer Constitution without its good points, tottered beneath the mighty blows of a brave nation. The Indian struggle of these years was from the Nationalist standpoint a struggle against British rule and an effort to wrench power from British hands. Read in its international context, and the background of crisis which Democracy, Capitalism and Imperialism faced everywhere, it was truly representative of the spirit of times and of the unrest prevailing in England, Germany, Austria, France and America; in

other words it was as much a struggle against British rule as against decadent plutocratic institutions that had been thrust on India and which had proved a miserable failure in practice because they satisfied no one. For what greater failure could there be of such institutions than its utter helplessness to solve Bardoli tangle? If the representatives of a country could not check bureaucracy from carrying out its will at Bardoli, the sooner such a constitution was thrown out, lock, stock and barrel, the better Bardoli reminded the Indian people once again that Montague-Chelmsford reforms were a fraud and poor reparations for Amritsar. Just as the German people in thick of economic crisis and devaluation of the mark in 1929 realised that Weimer republic was an insult added to the injury of Versailles, and propped up simply by Western nations and hence to be done away, with the Indian people too had similar sentiments. It was another matter that Germany selected a very reactionary solution for her ills, but the symptoms of political crises in both countries were same, and as for reactionary Government in Germany what we received in 1935 was hardly better. That, however, would form the subject of another chapter.

Having linked up Bardoli with the struggle in 1929-1932 and further that struggle with similar upheavals in Europe and America, let us now see what part the hero of Bardoli played in the battle of India's freedom.

The Calcutta Congress put forward a demand for



Dominion Status within a year, failing which complete Independence was to be the aim. The Lahore Congress translated into action the Calcutta resolution. The struggle was launched in April 1930. Gandhi made his historic march to Dandi. Patel went before Gandhi delivering speeches to the villagers on the way and strengthening their morale. He was arrested and sentenced to three months rigorous. His arrest electrified Gujerat. 75,000 peoples gathered on stands of Sabarmati and passed the following resolution —

“We, the citizens of Ahmedabad, determine hereby that we shall go the same path where Vallabhai has gone and we shall attain full Independence while attempting to do so. Without achieving freedom for our country we shall not rest in peace nor will we give Government peace. We solemnly declare that India's emancipation lies in truth and non-violence.” Dandi march let loose an avalanche of countrywide agitation. Like Mussolini's march on Rome in 1923, it had in its wake a mighty revolution. Riots, arrests, lathi charges were the order of day. Patel who had been released after undergoing three month's jail was arrested again on 31st July, 1930, along with some members of Working Committee. The arrest was effected on the occasion of Lokmanya Tilak's anniversary procession. The procession had been taken out in spite of section 144. Miss Maniben Patel daughter of Sardar Patel, was also taken into custody. People resorted to sit down in strike. Patel had a very brief span of freedom

before his arrest in July, but into this short interval he had packed immense activity. He had organised work in Bombay and Gujerat and brought them on war footing. Before his arrest he addressed Gujerat people in the following words —

"Give up your wedding festivities—a people at war with a mighty Government cannot afford to indulge in these past times. From to-morrow you might have to keep your doors closed and locked and betake to the fields, only to return home in the evening. You have earned a reputation that you have yet to do much to deserve. Now the die is cast, and there is no turning back. You have to vindicate Gandhi's choice of your Taluka as the scene of his first experiment in mass Civil Disobedience. I know some of you are afraid of your lands being confiscated. What is confiscation? Will they take away the lands to England? Rest assured, when you allow your lands to be confiscated the whole of Gujerat will be at your back.

"Organise your village and set an example to others. Every village must now be an armed camp. Discipline and organisation mean half the battle. Government have at least one Patel and one Talat to every village for us. Every adult in the village must be a volunteer.

"I see that fifteen days have taught you to cast off your fears. But two annas in the rupee are still there. Shake it off. It is the Government that has caused the fear.

I want to inoculate you with fearlessness. I want

to galvanise you into life I miss in your eyes the flash of indignation against wrong Non violence excludes anger The defection of two unfortunate brethren should serve to stiffen your resolve and to warn you for the future. You must not be angry with two friends who fall a prey to official machinations If those who sign the pledge break it with eyes open how long can you stop them ? Let Mahalkori chuckle over his precious guns. He will soon find his occupation gone ”

Apart from this stirring message there was a slogan of Patel which the people of Gujerat cherished very dear in their hearts —“Every home must now be a Congress office and every soul a Congress organisation” This message was given to the people when the Congress organisation had been declared illegal When Patel had gone to prison it became a by word with the people

This time the arrest of Patel was followed by a No Tax Campaign in Gujerat, Bardoli and Borsad Taluka The repression from Government side was very great. Dr Pittabhai Sitaramayya relates an incident which might easily have been taken from the copious account of Nazi Revolution in John Strachey's book, “The Menace of Fascism” The story is about the mother of Sardar Patel aged eighty She was maltreated by a Police officer who made his appearance in the house while she was cooking rice She was knocked down and the kettle containing rice was thrown down on the floor The rice was littered all over the place

If such was the condition of the mother of the most popular man in the province, the condition of other people can be best judged by the reader. This and many more such incidents fanned the flames of Civil Disobedience, till those goody-goody people at Whitehall, who perhaps did not know about such incidents or did not wish to know about them thought it better to ask their representatives in India to cry a halt in their repressive policy and send out peace feelers to Congress. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Dr Jayakar began their dreary round of visits from Yervada to Naini Jail and back, like Messrs Chambetlain and Daladier flitting about Godesberg, Berchtesgaden, London and Paris. The visits of these gentlemen to Yervada were followed by a conference between Gandhi Patel, Syed Mahmud, Jai Ram Dass Daulat Ram and Mrs Naidu. As a result of this conference the following conditions of peace were put forward —

- (1) Release of prisoners
- (2) Restoration of properties, fines, securities
- (3) Reinstalling of Government officers who had either resigned or had been dismissed

(4) Repeal of ordinances. There were further negotiations. Finally several Congress leaders were released and negotiations started with Viceroy. Gandhi Irwin Pact was signed. Patel was not satisfied with the manner land settlement question had been disposed of in the Pact. He did not like a peace in which he could not dictate his terms. That became

evident first at Bardoli, then after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact was followed by Karachi Congress. Sardar Patel was elected President by the Working Committee, as the normal procedure for election was not possible. In the Civil Disobedience movement after his release from the prison he had become the acting President of Congress and led the nation in its fight. But he was arrested shortly afterwards and sent to Yerwada prison. On his release the working committee re-elected him as President.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PRESIDENT

Karachi Congress was held under the shadow of executions of three great heroes of modern India, Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru. The entire nation was in mourning and they had created as much stir in India, as the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti did in America, of Thalemann in Germany and in China of four Chinese patriots in British possession and accused of murder of Japanese. This latter cases which happened before the flare up in the Pacific created first rate international crisis and might easily have hastened the war with Japan by an year if the British Government had not capitulated, and handed over the four patriots to Japan for trial. In India, however, in spite of the repeated requests of an entire nation these young men were not given back to the country. Even Gandhi had failed to get a reprieve for them.

The death of Pt. Moti Lal Nehru and the tragedy of Cawnpore riots also weighed heavily on minds of people. In view of all this, the reception arrangements were curtailed. Indeed the Peasant-President was himself a man who loved simplicity and would have even in normal times avoided all pomp and ceremony.

In this case it was his own wish that the ceremonies should be done away with. In the session itself before transaction of other business a resolution was passed on the Punjab executions. Sardar Patel himself referred to these executions in his Presidential address and said that although he did not agree with methods of S. Bhagat Singh, he had great praise for his courage and sacrifice. "The heartless and foreign nature of the Government was never more strikingly demonstrated than in their carrying out the executions in the teeth of the all but universal demand for the commutation of the death sentence. Let us not, however, be deterred from our purpose in a fit of resentment. This insolent exhibition of their armed power, but adds to the heavy indictment against the soulless system and increases our capacity for vindicating our position if we would refuse to be deflected from the straight and narrow path we have chosen. May the souls of the brave patriots rest in peace and may their families find comfort in the fact that the nation is a sharer of their mourning."

The Presidential address, which was brief, contained a retrospect of the struggle with British Imperialism and comments on such important events of the day as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, R. T. C., Non-violence, Hindu Muslim unity etc. Patel said —

"You have called a simple farmer to the highest office to which an Indian can aspire. I am conscious of that. Your choice of me as first servant is not so

much for what little I might have done, but it is the recognition of the amazing sacrifice made by Gujarat. Out of your generosity, you have singled out Gujarat for the honour. But in truth every province did its utmost during the year of the greatest national awakening that we have known in modern times."

Such was the humility with which our Peasant-President addressed the nation. It may be remarked that the choice of Sardar Patel was as much a tribute to his personality as to his province. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose did not yet dominate the Indian political world. After Bardoli, Patel's name had sky rocketed, and it would be no exaggeration to say that at that time next to Gandhi, Patel was the most popular and dominating figure in Indian politics.

He had a great antipathy for Legislative honours, since the days of the Gaya split. Now that there was talk of a new constitution for India, he could not be expected to show enthusiasm for it. He said —

"I am not interested in loaves and fishes of office or Legislative honours. The peasantry do not understand them. I believe that Gandhi's eleven points mean the substance of Swaraj. That which does not satisfy them is no Swaraj. Whilst I would respect the rights of landlords, Rajas, Maharajas, and others to the extent that they do not hurt the sweating millions, my interest lies in helping the down trodden to rise from their state and be on level with the tallest



in the land. Thank God, the gospel of truth and non-violence has given these an inkling of their dignity and the power they possess. Much still remains to be done. But let us make up our minds that we exist for them, not they for us. Let us shed our petty rivalries and jealousies, religious feuds and let every one realise that the Congress represents and exists for the toiling millions and it will become an irresistible power working not for the sake of greed or power, but for the sake of common humanity."

This was as much bitter denunciation of the New constitution as could be made at that time, when the fate of Round Table Conference still hung in balance. The Indian National Congress was officially at peace with British Government, but even then the Congress President had no illusions about the offer of the British. Landlordism also comes in for severe criticism at the hands of the President. He was sympathetic towards the under dog, but he did wish to abolish landlordism, only to reform it. He was not a Marxist. He reposed full confidence in Gandhian method of non-violence. He said

"Though there have been aberrations, it is a fact beyond question that India has given a singular proof to the world that mass non violence is no longer the idle dream of a visionary or a mere human longing. It is a solid fact capable of infinite possibilities for a humanity which is groaning for faith, beneath the weight of violence of which it has almost made a

fetish ”

Since the above speech at Karachi, eleven years have rolled by and to-day as in 1931, he remains a whole-hogging supporter of Gandhi. As would be clear from the reports of historic A. I. C. C. meeting at Allahabad before the start of the present movement Patel threw in his weight with the Gandhian group, and declared that in case of foreign invasion Gandhian method of non-co-operation with aggressor was most suitable to India.

About Hindu Muslim question too his altitude has been same to-day as eleven years ago, speaking at Karachi he said :—“As a Hindu I would adopt my predecessor’s formula and present the Muslims with a Swadeshi fountain pen and let them write out their demands. And I should endorse them.”

To-day he has said the same thing in different words. He has recently declared that he would not object to the British handing over power to the Muslim League and themselves quitting India. Needless to say that to-day as eleven years ago, this offer has been spurned by the Muslim League.

The other parts of his address dealt with untouchability, the spinning programme of Congress and the need of organising the peasants.

The Karachi Congress passed several resolutions, but at least two of them will go down in history as important charters of rights of the people of India and Burma, one of them related to Fundamental Rights and Duties

and the other to the right of people of Burma to separate from India. The resolution on Fundamental Rights and Duties should be considered as Indian equivalent of the American declaration of Independence and Rights of man. It was drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru, but it bore the stamp of character of Patel, especially the parts dealing with the peasants problem. The President and other members of Working Committee had assisted Nehru, for left to himself he might have as a Marxist thought out some other plan.

The resolution was as follows .

#### Fundamental Rights and Duties of Man.

I. (1) Every citizen of India has the right of free expression of opinion, the rights of free association and combination and the rights to assemble peacefully and without arms for purposes not opposed to law or morality.

(2) Every citizen shall enjoy freedom of conscience and have the right freely to profess and practise his religion subject to public order and morality.

(3) The culture, language and script of the minorities and of different linguistic areas shall be protected.

(4) All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour and in the exercise of any trade or calling

(6) All citizens have equal rights and duties in regard to wells, tanks, roads, schools, and places of

public resort maintained out of state or local funds or dedicated by private persons for the general public

(7) Every citizen has the right to keep and bear arms in accordance with regulations and reservations made in that behalf

(8) No person shall be deprived of his liberty nor shall his dwellings or property be entered, sequestered or confiscated, save in accordance with law.

(9) The state shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions.

(10) The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

(11) The state shall provide for free and compulsory primary education.

(12) The state shall confer no titles.

(13) There shall be no capital punishment.

(14) Every citizen is free to move throughout India and to stay and settle in any part thereof, to acquire property and to follow any trade or calling, and to be treated equally with regard to legal prosecution or protection in all parts of India.

### Labour

2. (a) The organisation of economic life must conform to the principle of justice, to the end that it may secure a decent standard of living.

(b) The state shall safeguard the interests of industrial workers and shall secure for them, by

suitable legislation and in other ways, a living wage, healthy conditions of work, limited hours of labour, suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen and protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and employment.

3. Labour to be freed from serfdom and conditions bordering on serfdom.

4. Protection of women workers and specially adequate provision for leave during maternity period

5. Children of school going age shall not be employed in mines and factories.

6 Peasants and workers shall have the right to form unions to protect their interests.

#### *Taxation and Expenditure.*

7 The system of land tenure and revenue and rent shall be reformed and an equitable adjustment made of the burden on agricultural land immediately giving relief to the small peasantry by a substantial reduction of agricultural rent and revenue now paid by them and in case of uneconomic holdings, exempting them from rent, so long as necessary with such relief as may be just and necessary, to holders of small estates affected by such exemption or reduction in rent, and to the same end, imposing a graded tax on net income from land above a reasonable minimum

9. There shall be drastic reduction of military expenditure so as to bring it down at least one-half

of the present scale

10. Expenditure and salaries in civil departments shall be largely reduced. No servant of state other than specially employed experts and the like shall be paid above a certain fixed figure, which should not ordinarily exceed Rs 500 per month.

11. No duty shall be levied on salt manufacture in India.

### *Economic and Social Programme*

12 The state shall protect indigenous cloth and for this purpose pursue the policy of exclusion of foreign yarn from the country and adopt such other measures as may be found necessary. The state shall also protect other indigenous industries, when necessary, against foreign competition

13 Intoxicating drinks and drugs shall be totally prohibited except for medical purposes

14. Currency and exchange shall be regulated in the national interest.

15. The state shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources railways, waterways, shipping and other means of public transport.

16. Relief of agricultural indebtedness and control of usury-direct and indirect.

17. The state shall provide "for the military training of citizens so as to organise a means of national defence apart from the regular military forces

The resolution on Burma has for us to-day a topical interest. The Congress admitted the right of people

of Burma to claim separation from India and to establish an Independent Burma state or to remain an autonomous partner in a free India, but it emphasised that the British Government were forcing separation on Burma without giving its people right to have their say. "This endeavour," the resolution read, "seems to be engineered to perpetuate British domination there, so as to make Burma together with Singapore, by reason of the presence of oil and their strategic position, strongholds of Imperialism in Eastern Asia. The Congress is strongly opposed to any policy which could result in Burma being kept as a British dependency and her resources exploited for British Imperialism, and would also be a menace to a free India, as well to other nations of the East."

It seems in the above resolution the Congress, eleven years ago, foresaw the future trend of the events in the Far East and made a prediction which rings true to-day. Burma has really become a menace to India.

Karachi Congress by ratifying Gandhi-Irwin Pact affirmed its faith in Gandhian leadership. But the resolution on the pact itself was couched in the language which the President had used in course of his address—namely there could be no whitring down of the Congress demand of Independence. It could not accept any constitution which did not give to the nation control over "the defence forces, external affairs, finance, fiscal and economic policy and to have scrutiny of the financial transactions of the British in,

India and to examine and assess the obligations to be undertaken by India or England and the right of either party to end the partnership at will and to make India free to accept such adjustments as may be demonstrated by necessity in its interests ”

Gandhi set out to England as the only representative of Congress

(2)

The truce with Britain was as short-lived as the similar peace treaties were between Britain and France from the time of outbreak of revolution down to the Congress of Vienna But President Patel did much before Gandhi returned and hostilities were started again The Working Committee met at Bombay and it was decided that anti-untouchability committee should be revived under the presidentship of Seth Jamna Lal Bajaj The labour question was also discussed and the committee decided that “Whenever possible it should endeavour to prevent by amicable agreement any penalisation or victimisation of labour in the mills, which have signed the Congress declaration and to help in the bettering of labour conditions in these mills ”

This decision was aimed at avoiding breach between capital and labour, at a time when any moment the front might be reopened against Britain Patel who has always believed in class compromise rather than class struggle was responsible for this move But all these matters pale into insignificance before the declaration of the Working Committee on communal



question. The President had dealt with it in a summary manner in his address, but the views set in its needed further elaboration and elucidation. Moreover with Gandhi in England, the Congress wanted to give a lie to the charge of the communalists that it had no solution about communal tangle. It would naturally strengthen the hands of Gandhi, if the Congress could succeed in enunciating a policy which satisfied all

The declaration of the Working Committee reviewed the situation ever since the passing of Nehru Report. It said that the Muslims and the Sikhs were dissatisfied with the solution of communal problem set in the Nehru Report, and therefore a restatement of the entire case was called for. The Congress however could not set forth any communal solution of the problem, it could only suggest a solution which "though communal in appearance, should be as nearly national as possible, and should satisfy all the communities concerned." The scheme was as follows

1. (a) The article in the constitution relating to fundamental rights shall include a guarantee to the communities concerned of their cultures, languages, scripts, education, profession and practice of religion and religious endowments.
- (b) Personal laws shall be protected by specific provisions to be embodied in the constitutions
- (c) Protection of political and other rights of

minority communities in the various provinces shall be the concern and be within jurisdiction of the Federal Government.

2 The franchise shall be extended to all adult men and women. (Note —The Working Committee is committed to adult Franchise by the Karachi resolution of the Congress and cannot entertain any alternative franchise. In view, however, of his apprehensions in some quarters, the committee wishes to make it clear that in any event the franchise shall be uniform and so extensive as to reflect in the electoral role the proportion in the population of every community.

3. (a) Joint electorates shall form the basis of representation in the future constitution of India

(b) For the Hindus in Sind, the Muslims in Assam and the Sikhs in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province, and for Hindus and Muslims in any province where they are less than 25 per cent. of the population, seats shall be reserved in the Federal and Provincial Legislatures on the basis of population with the right to contest additional seats

4. Appointments shall be made by non-party Public Service Commissions, which shall have due regard to efficiency of the public service as well as to the principle of equal opportunity to all communities for a fair share in the public services of the country

5. In the formation of Federal and Provincial

cabinets, the interests of minority communities should be recognised by convention.

6. The North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan will have the same form of Government and administration as other Provinces.

7. Sind shall be constituted into a separate province, provided that the people of Sind are prepared to bear the financial burden of the separated province.

8. The future constitution of the country shall be federal. The residuary powers shall vest in the federating units, unless a further examination, it is found to be against the best interests of India.

9. The working committee has adopted the foregoing scheme as a compromise between the proposals based on undiluted communalism and undiluted nationalism, whilst on the one hand the Working Committee hopes that the whole nation will endorse the scheme on the other it assures those who take extreme views and cannot adopt it that the committee will gladly, as it is bound to, by the Lahore Resolution accept without reservation any other scheme if it commands the acceptance of all the parties concerned."

This statement which touches on all the aspects of communal problem, cut the ground under the feet of Hindu Sabha and Muslim League and silenced all those educated, employed and unemployed young men, who go by the name of "middle class intelligentsia", in our society and who indulged in endless wrangling.

over such question as representation of various communities in services, legislatures and ministries. One might go further and say that communal problem was used by these people as a peg to hang upon their mutual jealousies, and factional rivalries and as a thick veil to hide their own frustrations and shortcomings. Anybody in those days who was not given a post by a Muslim or Hindu Minister or who could not get elected to the Assembly or fulfil his day dreams of becoming a Minister, become a champion of the cause of his community and blamed the communalism of other community for impeding the progress of his own. This disease which had come into the body politic of India after Simon Commission was like a canker eating into its vitals and destroying its strength. Patel finely stemmed the rot.

### (3)

Even before Gandhi returned to India, there had been breaches of Gandhi Irwin Pact. The situation had deteriorated in India. There was trouble in U.P., Bengal and Bardoli. Arrests continued, while the British representatives negotiated with Congress in India. Just as the British and American have often in the past carried on friendly negotiations with Russia while gaging the communists in their own country so in India they have often followed a double faced policy. They could not however continue this game for long. Sardar Patel was dissatisfied with the situation in Bardoli. When Gandhi had gone to England, there was an

understanding that an enquiry would be held into the allegations of police excesses in connection with collection of revenue in Bardoli. Mr. R. G., Gordon I.C.S., was appointed Special Officer with powers under the Land Revenue Code, to conduct the enquiry. Both Sardar Patel and Bholabhai Desai were present in the enquiry. The enquiry did not progress well. The allegations of Government excesses were not thoroughly gone into. Vallabhai who felt from the very outset the trend of the enquiry to be hostile and one-sided was prepared to go on till "our counsel was satisfied that further prosecution of the enquiry was futile.

That stage was reached soon. Vallabhai withdrew from the enquiry and sent the following cable to Gandhi on November 13, 1931.

"Examined 62 Khatedars, and 71 witnesses belonging to the seven out of the eleven villages allowed. Five villages disallowed as not falling within the terms of reference. After important admissions in part cross-examination of the Mawlatdar, first Government witness, enquiry officer held we were not entitled to production and inspection of Government documents of any kind relating to the issues in the enquiry. Trend of enquiry distinctly hostile and one-sided. In agreement with Bhulabhai withdrew from enquiry to-day." Vallabhai.

This telegram was the turning point of relations between England and India. Gandhi returned from

R T C after a few days and the struggle was restarted in January 1932. The Working Committee had decided that Patel should continue to be President even if he was imprisoned, but he should in that case delegate his powers to such other men he could consider fit to occupy that eminent office Vallabhai drew up a list of those who were to succeed him in case of his arrest. The list contained names of Rajendar Parshad, Dr. Ansari, Caveeshar, Kitchlew, etc. Soon afterwards, Patel was arrested under Regulation III of 1818 and imprisoned. He was kept along with Gandhi in Yervada prison. Gandhi was very much impressed by his society. On his release in May 1933 Gandhi described the life in prison in company of Patel in the following words —

“It was a great privilege for me to have been with Sardar Vallabhai Patel. I was well aware of his matchless bravery, but I have never lived with him as I have had the good fortune during the 16 months. The affection with which he covered me recalls to me that of my own dear mother. I never knew him to possess motherly qualities. If the slightest thing happened to me, he would be out of his bed. He superintended every detail in connection with my comforts. He and my other associates had conspired to let me do nothing, and I hope that Government will believe me when I say that he always showed a remarkable comprehension of the difficulties of the Government whenever we discussed any political prob-

lem. His solicitude for the farmers of Bardoli and Kaira I can never forget "

This tribute from the chief to his lieutenant illuminates a trait of character which is unusual in a man of Patel's temperament, namely his coolness in prison life. The prison neurosis sickens most men, even Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru felt it very much and he relates in his autobiography how he sometimes lost his temper or was annoyed with jail officials or tired of his fellow prisoners, because he could not have any privacy. Patel had no such neurosis. He lived in prison as one would live in a village, considering the entire village as one family unit, in which all the members were bound to each other by ties of love. With Gandhi, his friendship increased very much and the two men felt nearer to each other than they had done in the past. Prison life, which like the life in trenches, brings out the best element in man and teaches comradeship and brotherhood as much as it disciplines the mind, helped Gandhi and Patel to understand each other better. The foundations of that friendship which was later on to make Patel the chief exponent of Gandhism inside the Congress, were laid in Yervada prison.

Patel remained in prison much longer than Gandhi. Not even when Civil Disobedience was stopped in 1933 was he released. He became ill in prison, developed, nose trouble which became acute in July 1934. On 14th July he was set free, because his condition had begun to cause anxiety.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ORGANISER

When Patel came out in July 1934, the Congress was facing a crisis. The abrupt end of Civil Disobedience had brought about demoralisation and disintegration. The artificial unity inside the Congress created by the struggle collapsed as soon as the stress of that struggle was over. Conditions reminiscent of the early days of Weimer republic in Germany were being witnessed. There was the same unbridled enthusiasm for Parliamentary activities, the same confusion about any clear-cut path and the same lack of confidence and defeatism. The unity under the leadership of the All Highest Kaiser, which kept the world at bay for four years, collapsed overnight and Germany became a nation of multifarious political parties, social democrats, liberals, nationalists, junkers, Catholic centre party, and communists, each fighting the other to gain power. Inside the Congress there were similar divisions. Malviya and Aney had set up a Nationalist Party. They were out and out anti-Communal Award and disgusted with Congress policy about it. There was the constitutionalist faction inside the Congress, not belonging to Malviya group, but very much enthusiastic about work inside the legislatures without having a ghost of the idea how it was to be carried out, while the



grinning John Bull straddled on the fence and merrily watched the next move of the Congress. There was the Congress Socialist faction who wanted to introduce Marxist doctrines and Marxist methods inside the Congress. An extreme Nationalist wing was being formed by Shriyut Subhas Bose, who wanted to organise both those who were dissatisfied with Gandhian methods and those who were opposed to communal award without resorting to the tactics of Pandit Malviya. And finally there was the group who believed in "our Gandhi right or wrong". Such was the condition of India in 1934. In Germany, the crisis created by the Weimer republic were finally resolved by Hitler, who demolished the entire basis of the Parliamentary system. In India the unifying role was played by Patel, who though never achieved the measure of success, as Hitler did, yet, in certain respects, resembled him. It was he who organised the Congress Parliamentary machine in 1934. He may be called the Parliamentary Dictator for he never did away with Parliamentary institutions as Hitler did but certainly adjusted them as far as he could to suit the spirit of times. He was the nearest approach to a modern European Dictator that we had in India. Subhas Bose, who is nearer to Nazi ideology than Patel is, had never the power Patel had and had no time to put his ideas to the acid test of reality. Patel did. From 1934 to 1939 he played a dominating role in Indian politics, organised Parliamentary activities of Congress and later

on (in 1937—39) influenced and controlled democracy in India. How he did so and what were his achievements form the subject of these two chapters. But our understanding of him will be made easy if we see him in an international perspective, and keep in view the historic role played by him. In previous chapters we established how the 1929—34 struggle in India was linked up with the struggle in the world in those years against psuedo-democratic institutions, Capitalism and Imperialism. Just as India resembled other European Nations in its struggle, similarly the climax of that struggle in India had the same featutes as in Europe. Europe had, in 1934, Gil Robles, Mussolini, Dolfuss, Hitler and Beck. In India Vallabhai Patel represented the same spirit, and worked on the model of European Dictators.

He was President of the Congress at that time. Having been elected to that office in 1931, in July 1934 he still held it. In this way he remained President for three successive years. This compensated for his not being elected twice or thrice as in case of Subhas Bose or Jawaharlal Nehru. Before his release the Congress had embarked on a programme of contesting elections to the Central Legislature. Aney and Malviya after resigning from the Parliamentary sub-committee led the anti-Communal Award faction. These resignations were to be considered by the Working Committee. As soon as Patel had recovered from his illness he called a meeting of the Working Committee on September 2.

He declared that all efforts would be made for settlement, but the Congress attitude about the Award (that is it condemned the entire constitution in which Award also included) was correct

The meeting when it met could not consider the resignations of Aney and Malviya as most of the members of the Working Committee were absent. Some were ill, some in jail, yet others were occupied with Bihar floods. But discussions were held between Gandhi, Patel, Dr Roy, Bhulabhai Desai and M. Azad on the one hand and Malviya and Aney on the other. The discussions did not bear any fruit and prospects of party truce were remote. The Parliamentary Board was constituted without Aney and Malviya and the Working Committee appealed to the electorates to help the Parliamentary Board

The Nationalists, after being rebuffed by the Working Committee sought advice of Gandhi. They knew that an open rupture with Congress would damage their position irretrievably in the country. As a result of negotiations of Aney and Malviya a pact was made between the Nationalists and the Congress, in which each side was to avoid contest with the other. By mutual agreement, one side was to withdraw its candidate if the other side had a clear majority in that constituency. This electoral truce proved of immense advantage to both sides

Malviya constituted, however, one section of the anti communal award element in the country. The

other section was led by Shriyut Subhas Chandra Bose, and a third by the Hindu Sabha leaders. We are not concerned with the third, but will confine ourselves to the group led by Shriyut Subhas Bose. Bose had certain grievances against elderly Congress leaders since the death of C R Dass because he believed that in the war of succession that followed between him and J M Sen Gupta these leaders had backed up Sen Gupta. Apart from this he was somewhat of a rebel from the very outset and the Gandhian brand of Nationalism had always left him cold. Throughout the years following the Lahore Congress he had advocated an unrelenting struggle against British Imperialism and against moderates inside the Congress. Death of J M Sengupta ended for some time at least the civil war Spectre and Subhas Bose had unquestioned sway over Bengal and great hold over the younger elements in the country. Communal award was to the Bengal Hindus, what the red rag is to the bull. They thought it a sort of another partition of Bengal and felt that their peculiar situation in Bengal justified their stand, although it was not the stand of the Congress. Shriyut Subhas Bose was very bitter about it, and remained so. This only estranged him from the elderly Congress leaders and so far as Patel was concerned that was the first time that the two crossed swords. Differences of outlook between the two were existent ever since the days Patel identified himself with Gandhian philosophy. But it was the first time that the two found themselves

in hostile camps. It would not be within sphere of this book to enter into discussion as to whether Bose was justified in his stand or not. But it was the beginning of that mighty tussle inside the Congress which was to reach its climax at Tripuri.

While Bose was preoccupied with Bengal affairs his followers inside the Congress combined with Congress Socialists in their criticism of the Gandhian leadership and especially the spinning franchise programme of Gandhi. Patel who has been always a consistent follower of Gandhi was doubtful about the advisability of thrusting such a programme on Congress. Even if the alternative were retirement of Gandhi he would not advocate it. He would not coerce Congressmen into submission. He said :—

“The time has come when the Congress should decide either to retain Gandhi's leadership and fully implement his programme or allow him to retire and follow another programme. This in my opinion would be a better position than the present in which the Congress intelligentsia while voting for the programme of Gandhiji failed to implement the same and ultimately blamed the leader for the failure of the programme. Gandhiji made it absolutely clear that he had no programme and therefore it would be in the best interests of all concerned to decide the matter finally.”

This statement was followed by a more outspoken one in which he openly declared. “It is time for

Gandhi to retire. I won't be sorry if he decides not to attend Congress." And "There is no attempt to carry Congress by storm. The Gandhi party is not going to thrust spinning franchise programme on Congress." This is not to say that he had given up faith in Gandhi or Gandhism. He thought as a hard-headed practical politician that the cause of his leader would not be advanced by imposing spinning Franchise on a generation which had become disillusioned with Gandhian methods and after the failure of civil disobedience was seriously thinking whether the Marxist science of revolution was not after all more effective than the Gandhian. Patel was very bitter about these marxists who were taking advantage of the restlessness among people, and trying for a 'swing over' to the Left.

Speaking in Gujerat he said.—

"I am 'a blind follower of Gandhi. The Socialists should carry out their programme if they have any without interfering with my work, I would not tolerate their interference in Gujerat, where I have dedicated my life to bring Swaraj."

And indeed he did not brook any interference in Gujerat. He never allowed Marxist ideas to permeate among Bardoli or Gujerat kisans. They rallied round him because he had championed their cause against tyrnical taxation and high-handedness of British Government. Psychologically it was not marxist class consciousness, but a primitive herd-instinct which drew them towards their chief, whenever they felt that the

interests of the entire community were threatened. It was a devotion steeped in Hindu philosophy in which society is conceived as a sort of enlarged family with the chief of the tribe as a paternal head, who shows the same benovelence towards the people that the father does to his family. It was this leader-principle which inspired the peasants. Hence the ferocity in tone of Patel towards the Socialists whom he thought as "bad boys" of Marx out to break up the happiness of his 'family' of Gujerat peasants.

The landlords could not be excluded from this family. Patel was prepared to fight against British Raj and launch struggles to remove the grievances of kisans, but so far as landlordism was concerned he was not prepared to destroy it. At a Kisan Conference in U P. where the Socialists were present, he made it clear that he was opposed to class war and abolition of zamindari system. "Nobody can save the kisans except themselves," he said.

Besides the Socialists whom he never spared, Patel had a peasant's hatred for the modern capitalist structure which turned quiet villages into worktowns bristling with life and human beings into robots. He was not only anti-Socialist but opposed to industrialisation and the machine age. Observe his antipathy towards modern life in the following words. Visiting Bombay in 1934, he said .—

I feel uneasy in a city like Bombay. I am only at rest in a village. Cities like Bombay represent the

Imperial Government that rules over us. It is full of glamour, hubbub and arrogance. A farmer would be ill at ease in the midst of palatial buildings, motors, hotels, cinemas and all that goes with such a life. It is so unlike the culture of our race. We have assimilated much from the West that is artificial." Some time later speaking on industrialisation he said —

"True socialism' lies in the development of the village industries. We do not want to reproduce in our country the chaotic conditions prevalent in the Western countries consequent on mass productions." This Tolostyan attachment to village has always been the main feature of Patel's utterances. His views about development of cottage industries have always been opposed inside the Congress by Jawahar Lal Nehru. Commenting on the above statement in his autobiography he says —

"Some Congress leaders are frightened of industrialisation and imagine that the present day troubles of the industrial countries are due to mass production. That is a strange misreading of the situation. If the masses lack anything, is it bad to produce it in sufficient quantities for them? Is it preferable for them to continue in want rather than have mass production? The fault obviously is not in the production but in the folly and inadequacy of the distributive system."

This was as clear and correct statement of the Socialist case as could be made. It seems Patel like a practical politician later on adjusted himself to new



situation, and we find that while the Congress Ministries were industrialising the country and National Planning Committee was in session, Patel who was then the Chairman of the Parliamentary sub-committee did not start a campaign against industrialisation, but gave it his tacit consent. The idealistic love for Cottage Industries remained, but he had to shed much of his antipathy towards Industrialisation and introduction of Western methods. He did not then want to escape from Bombay, as it was not then an imperial city, but a city ruled by Congress Ministry guided by Parliamentary Sub Committee and its chairman Patel.

## (2)

The Bombay session of Congress was held in October 1934. The session revealed that Gandhi still dominated the Indian political scene. He might fail in his programme.

At times he might decide to retire and leave the Congress in hands of his lieutenants, but he continued to be the keyman of Congress. In this he resembles Field Marshal von Hindenburg who through he lost the war yet did not lose leadership in Germany, and till his death continued to have undisputed sway over the Germans. Hindenburg was the only hope of Germans and he represented to them what they were, he was an embodiment their past greatness. Similarly Gandhi, with all the virtues of an ancient Hindu saint, has been canonised by the Indians as a Mahatma who represents the traditions and civilisation of an India.

that is now no more

The Bombay Congress passed the following resolution about Gandhi —

“ This Congress reiterates its confidence in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and is emphatically of opinion that he should reconsider his decision to retire from the Congress. But inasmuch as all efforts to persuade him in that behalf have failed, this Congress while reluctantly accepting his decision, places on record its deep sense of gratitude for the unique services rendered by him to the nation and notes with satisfaction his assurance that his advice and guidance will be available to the Congress whenever necessary ”

This resolution would show the tremendous influence of the Gandhists inside the Congress. Gandhi had retired, but it was voluntary retirement, which Patel had proposed earlier. It left the Gandhi legend intact, and the Congress in the hands of his lieutenants, Patel and Rajendar Parshad.

The spinning franchise programme which was the cause of trouble was so adjusted as to satisfy the malcontents. Malviya group also received a set back for they failed to get their anti communal award programme accepted by the Congress.

After the Bombay Congress Sardar Patel and Babu Rajendar Parshad organised the Parliamentary work of Congress. They visited Punjab and at Lahore addressed a meeting. Patel defended the stand of Congress in regard to communal award. Punjab was a place, where

the obnoxious propaganda of Nationalists and Hindu Sabhaites, found an easy ground. It has never tried to be genuine in its love for Congress, and the slightest doubt cast in its mind by enemies of Congress results in a complete swing over to the other side. Bengal may differ from official Congress programme, but being ably led it has never abandoned the fundamental principles of Congress or allowed itself to be swayed by communalists. Hence the need of clarification of Congress stand by Patel and his selection of Punjab as the first place to open the election campaign.

Besides Lahore he visited various other cities and wherever he went he exhorted the people to vote for Congress. "A vote for Congress is a vote for Gandhi," said Patel.

The white paper and the new Constitution was also denounced by him. On his return from Punjab, speaking at a meeting in Gujarat Patel declared that Congress rejection of Joint Select Committee was complete and full, without any reservation. The Congress was prepared to go to the extent of non-co-operation in its rejection of the new Constitution.

Everywhere the Congress achieved great victory. The Congress Assembly Party in 1935 was formidable force. In its ranks were men, who later on became Ministers and Prime Ministers. They received their first training in administrative matters in Central Assembly. The debates were conducted on a high level and the Government suffered defeats after defeats.

A word may be said about the elder brother of Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, who has carried on the tradition of patriotism in Patel family. The father of the Patels distinguished himself in mutiny, having gone from Gujrat to Delhi to fight on the side of the revolutionaries. The younger Patel made a name for him at Bardoli and the elder became President of the Central Assembly in most difficult times. The present Congress Assembly party which is led by Bhulabhai Desai had not at that time come into being. The bureaucracy was still all-powerful, and Vithalbhai had often to throw in his weight with the Congress members to ward off its onslaughts on the interests of the nation. He played a prominent part in bringing pressure on the Viceroy to open up negotiations in Bardoli dispute. On the outbreak of Civil Disobedience in 1930, 1931, he resigned from Presidentship, and along with his brother took part in the National movement. He conducted the Peshawar Enquiry, the report of which was proscribed by the Government. In 1933, due to ill-health, he went abroad, visiting Austria, Italy, Switzerland. Subhas Chander Bose who also happened to be in Vienna attended on him and served him in his illness. Vithalbhai found that India's case was either grossly misrepresented abroad or not represented at all. He felt great need of propaganda in favour of India in foreign countries and as long as he lived there he issued several statements about Indian situation explaining it to the

European people. He decided to bequeath several lakhs of rupees to the nation for purpose, of foreign propaganda. Subhas Bose was made a trustee of that money.

Vithalbhai's health had grown from bad to worse and though he wanted to come to India, yet death did not permit him. He passed off quietly in a Swiss health resort, while Bose stood beside his bedside. His death news was flashed across all European newspapers and high tributes were paid to him by British newspapers, such as 'Daily Herald,' and 'Daily Express'

To Vallabhai his brother's death was more than a personal loss. Vithalbhai had been his brother as well as political comrade Towards the last days of Vithalbhai, nay, ever since the war of Independence of 1930, 1931, the two brothers had moved closer, and when ill-health forced Vithalbhai to go abroad, Vallabhai carried on the tradition of his parliamentary work. He remained out of Assembly and organised the Parliamentary activity of the Congress from outside, as his brother had done inside the Assembly In his hands the parliamentary work reached its climax.

There are few examples in the history of the world when both the brothers have made name in political world. Lenin's brother though famous in his own way for attack on Czar Alexander, yet died too soon to have even one hundredth of the popularity in the world Lenin had In recent English History we have the

example of Neville Chamberlain and Sir Austen Chamberlain, both of whom have risen high in British politics, and in our country there is such a pair of Bose Brothers, Subhas and Sarat Bose. But while Subhas has achieved great popularity in and out of India, which is at the time of writing greater than that of Vallabhai, Sarat has not risen as high as Vithalbhai Patel.

Indeed one might say that the success of the Patel brothers was phenomenal, and such things do not happen frequently in human history. The loss sustained by the Nation was immense, and one has only to visualise the part played by Vallabhai Patel in Congress Parliamentary Sub Committee, to realise what immense contribution could the elder Patel have made to this cause, with his rich experience and statesmanship if he were alive.

With the year 1936, opened the second phase of the parliamentary activities of Congress. Provincial autonomy was to be introduced next year, and elections were to be held towards the close of the year. The Congress had to make its attitude clear about Provincial autonomy and plan accordingly. Lucknow Session opened with a vigorous speech by energetic and youthful President Nehru, denouncing the New Constitution, Capitalism, Imperialism and Fascism. He made it clear that the Congress would contest elections to Provincial Legislatures not to work the constitution but to end it.

After the Lucknow Session the Working Committee met at Wardha on April 29 and Parliamentary

Committee was appointed consisting of Dr Rajendar Parshad, Patel, Rājaji, Narendra Dev, Desai, Maulana Azad and Presidents of all the Provincial Congress Committees. The Committee was to launch election campaign of Congress. Apart from being a member of the above Committee Patel was appointed Chairman of a Parliamentary Committee of five Provinces, Gujarat, Bombay Presidency, Karnatic, Bombay Province, and Maharashtra. While still engaged in work in these provinces, the Sardar had his old nose trouble which disabled him from all work for some time. He was operated upon again and after some days he recovered from it. Meanwhile the Congress Election Manifesto had been issued and the fight had started in right earnest. The Manifesto which only dotted the i's and crossed the t's of Lucknow resolution was a lengthy document. It referred to the work of past fifty years of Congress and asked the electorates to vote for its candidates.

Sardar Patel was very much optimistic about election prospects of Congress. The old campaigner knew which way the wind was blowing. He said, "When the Congress roller is in action, all pebbles and stones will be levelled."

He made a tour of the entire country, visiting U P in October 1936. He found U P to a man behind the Congress, and expressed the opinion that the Congress was sure to sweep polls in U P. He visited Punjab, N W F and other provinces of India too. He reminded the Punjabis that they had taken the pledge of

Independence on the banks of Ravi, the time had come to fulfil that pledge

Faizpur Session was held while this campaign was in full swing. It decided that the question of office acceptance should be dealt by an All India Convention after the elections were over.

The elections were over in February 1937 and Congress had clear majority in six out of eleven provinces, and in two provinces, viz., Assam and N. W. F. it was the strongest single party. The All-India Convention of Assembly members and the A. I. C. C. meeting decided that Congressmen should accept offices, wherever they were in majority subject to the condition that the Governors agreed not to use their special powers. The Parliamentary Committee was reconstituted with Sardar Patel as Chairman of Parliamentary Sub-Committee and Maulana Azad and Rajendar Parshad as other members. This Committee was to supervise the work of the Congress Ministries.

But before the Ministries could come into being there was a crisis. The Governors of various provinces led by the Governor of Bombay refused to give the desired promise. Thereupon the Prime Ministers refused to form any Government and a stalemate resulted. The responsibility for it lay entirely on the side of the Government. Sardar Patel commenting on Bombay Governor's action said "I am a most relieved man now."

There was a limit to which Congress could go.



That limit was reached. The Congress had gone out of its way to make the decision of office acceptance. 'It had' said Patel, "placed all its cards on the table in unambiguous terms, and it is now for the Government to take the next step. Congress has no craving for office, nor is it afraid of shouldering responsibility." The Governors tried interim Ministries and allowed them to rule in spite of the hostile Legislatures. But it simply would not wash. The Governor General realised the delicate situation, intervened and stopped the crisis. The Congress demand was conceded and Congressmen became Ministers in six provinces. After some time N W F P followed suit and so did Assam.

### (3)

But many other troubles were ahead for Congress Ministries. The political prisoners in Andamans had resorted to hunger strike and demanded repatriation and release. The Ministries wanted to get them repatriated and then released. The Government of India agreed to their repatriation after some time, but on the question of release the Governors would not budge an inch.

Patel visited U P, Bihar and Madras to gain first hand information about the crisis. The Congress Ministries had found a leader, who was never unnerved in face of greatest of difficulties and knew how and when to strike. Once he had seen things for himself, it did not take him long to make up his mind and

having done so he would put everything to the other side in a most frank manner. He did not use the phraseology of Nehru with its emphasis on international background of Indian problems, nor believe in his socio-economic theories. He was not capable of Gandhian sentimentalism, with its emphasis on having no ill-will against the other side and its glorification of suffering, although he was, as he put it a blind follower of Gandhi. He was made of the fibre that dictators are and would at the crucial moment tell the enemy that he could accept either this or that—no middle way was possible. He did so on the occasion of the last crisis, when he said that Congress was neither anxious for offices nor reluctant to shoulder the burden. It was for the British to choose the course.

Now when there were crisis again, he faced them precisely as he did the previous one. He called a meeting of the Parliamentary Subcommittee at Birla House on January 2, 1938 and explained to his colleagues the situation in the provinces he had visited. The committee approved of the stand of the Ministries and felt that there could be no going back.

The matter came up for discussion at Haripura Session of the Congress.

The Congress Ministries in U. P. and Bihar had resigned. The Session was held in an electric atmosphere and it was felt by everybody that things were again in a state of flux. Patel moved the resolution about the release of political prisoners and declared that Governors

had precipitated the crisis. The Congress Ministries were only implementing their election programme.

“The object of the Congress in accepting office was not to adorn the ministerial chairs or to enjoy fruits of office. It was only to help the movement for Independence of the country and strengthen the masses. Since the Congress accepted office, they have always felt that it was their primary duty to release all political prisoners.” Referring to the argument of the Governors that these men would create trouble if released, Patel said —

“In such a vast country as Hindustan are not there other men holding violent views and yet out of prison? If we cannot release 15 prisoners, what is this so-called provincial autonomy. The interference of the Governor-General in Bihar and U P has exposed the farce of Provincial autonomy. Supposing the prisoners misbehaved after their release, they could certainly be put back in jail. Did not the Congress Ministries promulgate section 144 at Sholapur and at Cawnpore? Wherever there was a need of firm action, the Congress Governments had not hesitated and during the last six months they had ruled effectively. Concluding he said.

“This is not the time to show differences, but this is the time when interests of the country are pitched against Imperialism and let us demonstrate by our action to-day that we are united in action as well as in purpose. We shall show restraint to-day because we know we can successfully retaliate. We shall show

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patience and wait because we are ready for all emergencies and are prepared for whatever action that became necessary. That is the reason we have not asked other ministries to resign and precipitate crisis. That is why we have requested the Governor-General to reconsider his decision. Before we plunge into action, we want to give a chance to the Governor-General to redeem his action."

Compare this speech with Gandhi's statement about the crisis. The difference between the two is the difference between a broadcast of Archbishop of Canterbury on the entry of German troops in Poland and a similar broadcast by Mr. Churchill. Every sentence of it is a defiance hurled at Britain. While Gandhi tries to make the British feel ashamed of their actions and thus asks them to rectify their error, Patel utters a plain warning that Congress will retaliate unless . . . He knows his strength and would not hesitate to use it if the occasion demanded. He does not believe that soft words can always win the other side. While the door for negotiations should be left open, the Congress Ministries should be ready like a disciplined army to follow the Parliamentary chief, and at a word from him all should resign and get ready for direct action.

The President of the Congress, Subhas Bose, was as much concerned over the release of political prisoners as Sardar Patel. He had exerted his influence in Bengal to get the prisoners released, but failed. Jawaharlal

Nehru was also impatient for action and told the people to keep their knapsacks ready for jail. Wisdom, however, prevailed with the British Government and they agreed to Congress demands. The ministers came back to their offices and the prisoners were released.

These two blows dealt by the Congress Parliamentary Committee on the British Imperialism silenced it for the next year and a half. After thus knocking out the external enemy, Patel devoted his attention to the internal affairs of the Congress. With the end of the constitutional crisis began the real era of Congress rule.

## CHAPTER V

### HIGH COMMAND

The word 'High Command' has been often used about Congress Parliamentary Sub Committee, because it wielded power over seven Congress Ministries. It has been used to signify the entire elderly bloc of Working Committee members, popularly known as "Rightists" and it has been used about Gandhi alone. But apart from Gandhi who rarely interfered in Congress affairs, and Nehru who was the intellectual leader of Congress and its guide in theoretical matters or sometimes in working class and peasant problems, Patel remained throughout the 'life' of Congress Ministries the real High Command. Legally it were his orders, which were obeyed because he was the Chairman of the Parliamentary Board. In practice too he carried on immense work singlehanded and all the important matters were planned by him. His interference was final; his displeasure meant that the fate of a particular problem was sealed. His consent was the consent of the entire committee. We will divide the work of this Parliamentary chief in three parts. The first is administrative reforms, the second State's People's affairs, and the third purges inside the Congress.

#### (1)

Of the administrative reforms, most of those in



which Patel was directly concerned were carried out in Bombay. In other cases he gave merely his advice or acted as arbitrator as in case of Tenancy Bill in U. P. In Bombay the ministry introduced a rapid constructive programme

Panchayats were revived. Rural reconstruction work was hurried on and great attention was paid to cottage industries. Two reforms of Bombay Government stand out, the one was Bombay Trades Disputes Bill and the other Prohibition. Both created great furore, and both the schemes were fathered by Patel. Before we deal with Bombay Trades Disputes bill, we should make clear the attitude of Patel towards labour matters. We have seen that he was no socialist and often criticised the socialists severely, and warned them against interference with Gujerat peasants. In Ahmedabad he claimed exclusive right to organise the labourers. He had great hold over them. His first contact with them was in 1918 when Gandhi organised the strike of the workers and had it successively terminated after a brief fast. This success encouraged Patel. He saw that if the working class leaders inflicted sufferings on themselves, the workers as well as the capitalists became their followers. Gandhi had fasted. It had increased the morale of the workers who clung to their demands, and it had mortified the capitalists, who finding Gandhi already popular in Gujerat thought that by allowing him to die they were making their own position untenable in the province, and so they capitulated. This personal factor in labour capital disputes

greatly impressed young Patel. Gradually his own influence increased with Ahmedabad workers as well as capitalists, because of his immense sacrifices for the country.

After the Bardoli campaign, and his Presidentship of Ahmedabad, Municipality, his position among both sides was enhanced still further. The under-dog loved him, because he had stood by the Bardoli peasants, the top-dog feared him, because he knew that Patel was the most popular figure in Gujarat and the only man who could check the workers from falling into hands of the communists, his inveterate enemies. Patel's success with Ahmedabad workers, phenomenal as it was, should be considered a natural outcome of his consistent fight for them and his willingness to level himself to their life. One need not be a blind follower of Gandhism to appreciate the way he established his hold over the Ahmedabad workers and Gujarat peasants. The Marxists in this country can learn much from his example. Sometimes we see here the ludicrous spectacle of spoilt aristocratic boys with idealistic love for communism, and without the faintest idea of what the Marxist Lenin-Stalinist tradition is, propped as leaders of Trade Union Movement. They prove to be complete flops, because they can never give up the life of ease, renounce comforts and live the life of working class among working class people.

They cannot inspire confidence, because they cannot bear suffering. They try to reverse the saying of Stalin

That revolutions are not made by wearing silken gloves ' and fail miserably in their endeavour It is obvious no Marxist can follow tactics of Patel so far as Working class - Capitalist quarrels are concerned, but they should be able to live up to certain standard of life if they are to capture working class people

Patel struck the simplest chord in hearts of workers and succeeded He built up an organisation of workers in Ahmedabad entirely on different lines teaching them the lesson of Non violence and Truth and warning them against assimilating any other ideas

He was not content with that We find him in 1938 calling upon the entire Indian working class to rally to the banner of Truth and Non violence He said

I hope that if they organised and consolidated themselves still more and marched on with a firm belief in truth and Non violence and the principle of arbitration they would one day capture the T U C and show to India that this was the way of organising labour in their interests '

And again

The condition of those workers who were guided by persons with foreign ideas and conceptions of labour had become weak and disorganised and they had frittered away their energies in useless strikes The whole of textile trade had been ruined and the same was true of Cawnpore and other centres Labour all over India must make their choice Their experience of over 21 years told them that their path was good "

This challenge to the Trade Union Movement of India might have proved as serious as the challenge of the two Anarchist Trade Unions of Spain, Federation Iberian Anarquista, and Confederation National de Trabodajos did to Communists and Socialists (and apart from difference of violence, Gandhism is nearer to Anarchism than any other modern creed), but for the fact that the Sardar had found other matters of greater interest, and secondly the Congress ministries in U.P. and Bombay had practised non-violence and truth in such a way against the workers that they had no illusion about Gandhism left. Let us take up the Bombay Trades Disputes Bill. It was called the Black Bill by the Bombay workers. It made arbitration compulsory and fixed a time after the breakdown of negotiations for the strike to start. In this interval the Government was to explore all avenues of peace. The Bill led to a protest strike in Bombay and in that strike the Government mishandled the situation. Fire was opened on defenceless workers before Spring and Phoenix Mills. Two workers were killed and several injured. This was one of the few instances when Congress ministries had used violence against the working class, and it would go down in history as one of the blackest chapters of Congress regime. The responsibility for this utterly senseless firing was that of Bombay Government and of its Home Minister K. M. Munshi. Mr. Munshi who has shown so much solicitude for Bardoli peasants in his book "I Follow the Mahatma",

behaved exactly in the manner Gil Robles did in Spain in putting down the rising of Asturian miners in October 1934

He made the position of Congress High Command untenable. The firing was condemned by even such men as Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. The hearts of the working class were lacerated when no action was taken against Generalismo Munshi.

The Bombay Trades Disputes Bill very nearly broke up the National Front between the working class and the Congress.

About the scheme of Prohibition a similar opposition was encountered

The difficulty arose not due to opposition of the working classes, who considered it a great boon, but from the side of the vested interests in Bombay, who saw in it red ruin for their trade. Patel was more than a match for them. He felt that it was part of the Congress election programme and it must be carried out. It was not their opposition which annoyed him. It was the opposition of Sir Sikander Hayat Khan and Subhas Chander Bose, who had come all the way from Punjab and Bengal respectively to denounce this scheme. Patel raged against them.

"Bose and Sikander have logs in their eyes," said Patel. They were sailing in the same boat and interfering in a matter which was no concern of theirs. There was no difference between the two. Subhas had himself as President, approved of the scheme which

he was opposing

There might be two opinions about the choice of words of Sardar Patel in regard to Bose, but there could not be any difference of opinion about the unreasonableness of stand of Subhas Bose. It was hardly the matter which should have been opposed by a patriot like him.

The vested interests in Bombay were encouraged by statements of Bose and Sikander. The Bombay Government had decided to levy property and sales taxes on the rich in order to compensate for the loss of revenue incurred in prohibition. There were demonstrations in Bombay against these measures. Patel would not take them back. He declared that the rich must amend for the loss incurred by the poor. He warned the Government of India too that it would have to help Bombay Government if it incurred any loss. Lack of Central support might precipitate constitutional crisis and if prohibition failed in Bombay, and Central Government stood by as a passive spectator, then all the Congress Ministries would resign.

The prohibition was introduced on August 1, 1939. Patel led the inaugural procession. It had a short life, not because the Central Government sabotaged it, but the resignations of Congress Ministries after the war ended it. The new Government reversed the previous policy. So much about Bombay. In the general administration of the country Patel's contribution was great. The Wardha scheme

of education and the National Planning committee are the two outstanding achievements of Patel era as Parliamentary Dictator. They were planned by Dr. Zakir Hussain and Jawaharlal Nehru respectively but Patel co-operated with them. This was a great contribution if we remember that he has been opposed to mass industrialisation and has backed up the idea of cottage industries instead. All the seven Governments gave co-operation to national planning committee.

The conditions of peasants in Bihar and U. P. has always been deplorable. The Parliamentary Sub-Committee first took up the matter of Bihar peasants in its hands Rajendar Parshad and later on Abu ul Kalam Azad visited Bihar and succeeded in getting the Tenancy Bill passed, after long negotiation with zamindars of Bihar.

In U. P the zamindars were more truculent, and there the Bill had been persistently obstructed by the Zamindars. They talked of bloodshed and civil war. Sardar Patel intervened and decided to settle the dispute between the Landlords and the U. P. Government, but the former questioned his motives, and declared that Congress High Command was not in any way different from the U. P. Ministry.

"It was pulling chestnuts out of fire for the U. P. Government", said the zamindars. Sardar Patel replying said that it was the unkindest cut of all. The Congress Parliamentary Committee had intervened on the request of the Zamindars, but now it won't. This was a grim

resolve. Pandit Nehru spoke in a similar strain.

It became obvious that the threats of civil war of these Nawabs and Rajas and Knights could not deter Sardar Patel. He knew that these debauched, effeminate gentlemen, who had yielded to the British without a fight, and had been since propped up with the help of British bayonet were incapable of civil war or shedding anybody's blood except their own. They might have chosen to drown themselves in Jamna, one and all, They might have committed Hari Kari on tombs of Asaf-ud-Daula, and Saadat Ali Khan those picturesque titular Emperors of Oudh who only to be left alone to enjoy their women and wine allowed the British to occupy all the responsible positions in the State. They might have done all this and much worse to themselves, but it could hardly move the High Command. Time alone came to the rescue of the Nawabs and Knights of Oudh. The constitutional crises prevented passing of U. P. Tenancy Bill.

As soon as the Provincial autonomy began to work, the British statesmen thought that the time had come to do something about Federation too. They wanted to thrust it on India over the head of its representatives. Negotiations were going on between Provinces and the British Government. The Congress felt that it was impossible to accept the representatives of Princes on the Federal Legislature because the States people had no say in the matter. The working of Provincial autonomy did not mean that it would agree



to a sham Federation. The question of Federation naturally focussed the attention of Congress on the condition in States. Besides eminent leaders in British India had begun to realise the utter absurdity of having democracy in one part of India, while the other part was being ruled by the States' Princes, in a medieval way. Thus began the States people's movement. It was led inside the Congress by four men : Gandhi, Patel, Jawahar Lal Nehru and Pattabhai Sittaramaya. Before the inauguration of Provincial autonomy too, these men had from time to time taken up the cudgels on behalf of States people. But now the campaign was launched with increased ferocity. After Jawahar Lal Nehru's speech against States' administration in Lucknow as well as Faizpur Sessions Sardar Patel was the first to start the ball rolling. On March 20, 1938, while speaking about Congress attitude about Federation, he said —

“Like beasts people cannot be transferred without their consent. The Congress has refused to sit with the representatives of the Princes in the Federation and will not think of it if the States' people are not properly represented, and responsible Government installed in the States. The British Imperialism and the Princes are carrying on negotiations not remembering the States peoples. Federation is an absurd arrangement between plutocracy and Imperialism and vested interests and the people have nothing to do with that kind of thing. We want to bid good bye to Prince-

dom We cannot allow our birth-right of self determination to be encroached upon I appeal to you all to be awake to the realities of the situation, and be ready for action "

These were not mere idle words They represented the sober views of a man who had fought oppression at Bardoli and Ahmedabad and was prepared to fight it again wherever the need be. Soon there was occasion to put these ideals into practice. In Mysore there had been some trouble The State authorities had opened fire on unarmed people and killed and wounded many Patel visited Mysore in May 1938 and saw for himself the bullet marks on the walls But Mysore was not the only place where the State rulers had misbehaved In Kathiawar the situation was worse. Since the summer there had been ferment in Rajkot Certain constitutional reforms were to be brought about and the Prince had given his consent Then the British Resident Sir Patrick Cadel intervened and stopped constitutional reforms He was the enemy of progress and had kept the Prince in an abjectly helpless state. The State people started a Satyagraha and Sardar Patel blessed the first batch of Satyagrahis on November 13, 1938. The movement was to a great extent aimed against the Dewan, Sir Patrick Cadel There was danger of its spreading to other Kathiawar States. Sardar Patel speaking a few days later warned the Kathiawar Princes that unless they improved their administration, they might have to witness another

Rajkot. He openly declared that he was guiding the movement in Rajkot. He was very much bitter about the education that had been given to the Princes. He had an anarchist's faith in intrinsic goodness of man. The Princes according to him had received an education which "had turned them from men into beasts"

These were quite strong words, as strong as anything Hitler has said about "international Jews" or "Anglo-Saxon Imperialism" or "Bolshevik Barbarism". Of Indian leaders only Jawahar Lal Nehru and Patel use strong language in their speeches, but whereas Nehru avoids epithets, and likes the trend of his argument to be such as to convince the reader that he is justified in his slashing attack, Patel, says everything briefly, his sentences act as an initial artillery barrage to cover the mass attack of his army. He acts, leaving the other fellow to reel under his blows, become steady for a while and whimper against his attack then reel again, till he is knocked out. Whatever talking there is, is done by the enemy and very little by him.

Sometimes his colleagues do the talking on his behalf, while he organises the army for attack. It seems he has a passion for action, and a great belief in the ultimate victory of organised strength as against unorganised hands, however preponderating their numbers be. He has a soldier's contempt for negotiations before the enemy has capitulated. Instinctively, he knows that there will be a fight, and he prepares accordingly. In Rajkot, while the initial attack was being

launched by Patel, Gandhi did the talking and thinking. He presented the Dewan with peace formula, which was however rejected. The struggle went on with increased ferocity. Volunteers began to pour from all sides of India. But Patel wanted the struggle to be restricted to Rajkot people only. So he advised outsiders not to interfere in Rajkot affair. The number of Rajkot people involved in the struggle was so great that there was no need of outside help. The Rajkot authorities felt the pressure of the movement and the Praja Parishad was declared unlawful. Maniben Patel, daughter of Sardar Patel who was taking a prominent part in the movement while her father organised the rear addressed meetings in Rajkot. She was arrested and the situation became tense. Lathi charges were frequent and the toll of casualties mounted every day. The Jam Sahib, in a speech referring to the struggle carried on in states by the Congress threatened use of full force that the states had at their command. Replying to him Sardar Patel said —

“ They (Princes) talk loudly of their resources with which they propose to suppress the movement for responsible government but they forget the fact that they have no resources except those of their own subjects’

Referring to Sir Patrick Caddi he said — “ In my opinion Sir Patrick Caddi is only a tool in the imperialist game of propping up the princes, who in the words of *London Times* “ refuse to move with times ”

The Congress Working Committee met soon

afterwards, and the Rajkot situation was discussed. It was satisfied with the way the movement was carried on there. A resolution was passed demanding responsible government in states.

The Congress could not restrict itself to Rajkot only. When the Princes were joining hands it was natural that the struggle should become general and Congress should at least give its moral support to people in other states.

Meanwhile the situation at Rajkot somewhat eased. Sir Patrick Cadel decided that Patel should meet him and Thakore Sahib. The Satyagrah was called off on the promise of Thakore Sahib to Patel that responsible government would be introduced in Rajkot.

The Prince did not redeem his promise and thought that the Congressmen were too busy with Presidential election to meddle in Rajkot affair. He had calculated wrongly. Patel was capable of fighting on two fronts, and as soon as it became clear to him that Thakore Sahib was going back on his words, he ordered resumption of the struggle. Maniben Patel who had been released after the suspension of the first Satayagrah went again to Rajkot along with Mrs Kastura Bai Gandhi, and took up the command there. The people of Rajkot respected her as much as they did her father. Maniben, brought up in a warlike surrounding, and having witnessed many campaigns of her father, has imbibed Patel's love for action. Patel's Secretary and second in-command, she is a ventable amazon and

represents the heroic spirit of India's womanhood. In the present fight of India's freedom there are many such examples when daughters have fought shoulder to shoulder with their fathers. Maniben occupies a unique position among these women.

Her presence in Rajkot accelerated the tempo of movement. Patel speaking, on February 7, 1939, was able to strike an optimistic note about Rajkot. He said,—

“The spirit of the Satyagrahis in Rajkot is stronger to-day than ever and those responsible will be soon brought to their senses.”

He was apprehensive about the entire fate of constitutional government in India, and felt that if the Central Government did not interfere the Bombay Government may resign. Situation was fast deteriorating there. Maniben Patel, who had been arrested along with Mrs Gandhi, had been kept separate from her and had consequently resorted to hunger strike. Gandhi, who had all along guided the movement, had felt that the time had come to stop the matter from growing worse. On February 27 he left for Rajkot. His presence there failed to evoke any sympathetic chord in the heart of Sir Patrick Cadell. On March 4, he commenced his historic fast. The fast shook the entire nation. Patel warned the Viceroy: “Parliamentary Policy will come to an end, if Viceroy does not interfere in Rajkot.” The fast had lasted only four days, when the Viceroy came forward with the

assurance that Thakore Salub would honour his pledges, and introduce responsible government in the state.

The Satyagrah was called off and the Rajkot struggle ended in a triumph for Congress

### (3)

So much about the states and administration in Provinces. All these battles, against vested interests, Princes, conservatives, and men to whom every reform or new step was an anathema, increased his respect in minds of people. But that is only one part of the story. The Parliamentary chief had not only to think out reforms or fight Princes, he had to maintain discipline among the ministries and see to it that a high level of administration was maintained. In achieving this he became very much unpopular with certain sections of people, while others thought that if he had not done so, efficiency inside the Congress would have become a thing of the past. Let us take first of these purges. The guillotine first fell on Nariman. Mr. Nariman occupied a very eminent position in Bombay. He had some grievances against Sardar Patel dating to the year 1934. He alleged that Patel had interfered in elections in that year, and had tried to encourage rivals of Nariman thus causing his withdrawal. Men like Mr. B. G. Kher who were comparatively less popular than Nariman had risen high while the Parsi leader had remained in the background. It was gall and wormwood to Nariman that he was nobody in Bombay ministry simply because he had fallen out

with Patel. He issued forth all sorts of wild charges against Patel, which led to great controversy. Finally Gandhi and Mr Bahadurji made an inquiry into the matter and came to the conclusion that Nariman had acted indiscreetly and he was unworthy to hold any office inside the Congress. The Working Committee met and confirmed Gandhi's findings. Nariman was branded a rebel and punished with bell, book and candle. From that day onward he became a sworn enemy of the Congress High Command and Patel in particular and we find that later on he joined Subhas Chander Bose in the joint campaign against Patel and his colleagues. He always stressed that differences between him and Patel were political and ideological. He was opposed to moderate Nationalism and wanted a stern struggle against British Imperialism. He liked to call himself a Leftist and Patel a Rightist. This was all very confusing since aggressive nationalism as we have begun to understand is always the anchor sheet of the parties of extreme right. It is not only in Germany that aggressive Nationalism has ended in Fascism, it is true of all countries—Yugoslavia Rumania, Norway, France and Japan.

If men like Nariman had their way they would do the same in India. It was not Patel, who was on extreme Right, but Nariman. Jawahar Lal Nehru has in one of his books attempted to clear this Rightist and Leftist confusion. In his opinion there are no Rightist or Leftist divisions in Congress. The bulk



of the Congressmen belong to centre group with a Rightist minority and a Leftist fringe.

In light of recent experiences we might add to the above classification and describe the Congress groupings as follows : —

Extreme Nationalists	. Extreme Right.
Centre Nationalists	... Right Centre.
including Gandhists	
Congress Socialists and	
no-party Socialists like	
Nehru	*.. Left.
Communists	... Extreme Left.

It was not proper for Nariman to hide personal differences under the smoke-screen of ideological talk. It is doubtful if he were in Patel's place he should have done anything less. After his wild charges against a man who had been entrusted with control of eight ministries he could not expect to go scotfree. Patel's parliamentary system was not based on democracy—it was a reaction against democracy—a part of the wave against democracy which was sweeping all over the world at that time. Anybody who did not agree with it had to be eliminated. Yusuf Meharally has brilliantly described this trait of his character in the following words,—

“Either one agrees with him and is incorporated in his machine or one disagrees with him, and is sent to the wall. He has ruthlessly but tactfully eliminated opponents out of his path.”

Nariman not only disagreed with him, but like the younger Storm Troopers Karl Ernst and Ernst Roehm he had personal differences with the Dictator. These two storm troop leaders were shot by Hitler. Nariman was not shot, but merely eliminated because Patel was not the type as Dictator Hitler was.

The other notable purge carried out by Sardar Patel was of C P Premier Dr Khare. There were old differences between Dr Khare and two of C P ministers. Repeated quarrels had broken out and Sardar Patel and other leaders had patched up the differences. Dr Khare wanted to get them out of the way. But he had given an assurance to the Congress High Command *that he would not take any step without consulting them*. He broke this promise and staged a manoeuvre by which he hoped to get rid of the two ministers. He resigned himself and asked his other cabinet ministers to resign too. Messrs Shukla and Misra did not fall in the trap and declined to resign. As Dr Khare had resigned on his own initiative and with the expectation that the Governor would ask him to reconstitute the cabinet, and he would be able to eliminate the two rivals, the Congress High Command intervened and Dr Khare was asked to explain his conduct. The entire nation took a great interest in the affair and statements of Sardar Patel and Dr Khare were splashed by the newspapers. After some time the Working Committee met and Khare was asked to resign his post as Premier, his leadership of Assembly Party and even

his seat as member of Assembly.

Unlike the Nariman case, no bed-and-kitchen sentimentalism was lavished on Dr. Khare. There was no pretence on part of Dr. Khare that he had ideological differences with Sardar Patel, and therefore he was thrown out. It was clearly a matter of discipline.

A chorus of approval from such men of divergent views as Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhas Chander Bose ("Khare would have been shot in Germany") greeted this action of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee. It was suggested in certain quarters that a Prime Minister of a Province was primarily responsible to his electorates and could be thrown out by them only. It was undemocratic of Congress High Command to interfere in a matter which was no concern of theirs. This argument is fallacious. A member of Assembly or a Prime Minister is responsible to the electorate no doubt, but he is also responsible to the political party to which he belongs. The classical example of this is the case of Messrs Phillip Snowden, Jimmy Thomas, and Ramsay Macdonald who on the resignation of the labour government in 1931, carried on negotiations with the King over the head of the National Council of Labour and Labour Parliamentary Committee. The result was that they were disowned by the Labour Party, and asked to resign from all its offices. If the Labour Party could not force them to resign their seats that was due to the peculiar British Constitution and also due to absence of any nation-wide campaign on

behalf of Labour Party

Other examples of the party riding roughshod over the wishes of its Ministets are the cases of Lloyd George replacing Asquith as Prime Minister and leading Liberal Party during the war, Churchill replacing Chamberlain during this war. Indeed these instances could be multiplied infinitely. There was nothing strange in action of the Congress High Command. The only difference is that it was more drastic in its purges than the parties were in the above case. But the reason was that those parties never wielded the power among the electorate that the Congress party did in India.

It was this confidence which inspired the Parliamentary Sub-Committee to such drastic actions. Besides this Committee was much more than a representative body of Indian people, it was representative of the spirit of times, and it had to adjust itself according to changed conditions. Everywhere democracy needed a strong hand whether from the right or left to save it. They were doing that in England, America, Europe. How can one expect such a thing not to happen in India? Somebody was to bridle democracy in India, and prevent it from going to the rocks as the Weimer republic did in Germany or Montagu and Chelmsford reforms did, in India. Without a strong hand it would not have lasted a day. It would either have become a plaything of the liberals or a stick in hands of the bureaucrats with which to beat the Indian people.

The strong hand was wielded by Patel, because it could not be wielded by any one from the left, the left being always in a minority in Congress

The Khare affair received great publicity in England, where the new powers that Patel had assumed created quite a sensation. The comment of "News Review" is revealing of the British reaction about Patel's dismissal of Khare

"To prove the complete power he had gathered into his hands Patel could have found no more redoubtable victim than Premier Khare first Congressman to head an Indian Cabinet. Wealthy Surgeon Khare was an old goal mate of the Mahatma's. Of Brahmin family noted for its fighting stock, he won himself an early reputation as a dangerous man to cross. Besides running his own practice he found time to edit Taram Bharat (Young India) most intransigent of Indian Nationalist news organs. He is an inveterate smoker of expensive English cigarettes, sacrificed an income of 20,000 rupees a year to head the Central Provinces Ministry with an income of Rs 6 000 and an occasional scolding from Sardar Patel."

### Patel's Broom

"Most ruthlessly unorthodox Member of India's Nationalistic Congress Party is its "Shadow" leader hary Sardar Vallabhai Patel, when elected President of the Municipality of Ahmedabad, a northern cotton town, he secured a broom and ostentatiously swept the public histories and streets. More recently he has

devoted much energy to cleaning up graft, slackness and political chicanery in the seven provinces controlled by the Congress

Last week broom wielder Patel roused the dust even in the far away corridors of Whitehall's India Office. Wires buzzed with reports that he was sweeping along the way to Fascism

This confirmed the suspicions of British officials that Congress in opposition to the All India Federation plan is attempting to establish a parallel government to the British Raj

How effectively the organizing has progressed was shown recently when the powerful Congress Working Committee calmly assumed the prerogative of Central Provinces Governor, Sir Frank Wyles. Kicked out of office with no more ceremony than is required to fire an office levy was recalcitrant Premier Dr Khare

### Revolution

Dismissal of Provincial Premiers is one of the functions reserved under the Constitution Act of 1935 to the Governors. The Congress coup, therefore, came as the climax to a series of defiant gestures. Since its foundation 52 years ago by a retired British Indian Civil Servant Vetanc Hume, National Congress has reached its maximum irritation to Britain under the rules of pacific Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Socialist Subbas Bose. Ascetic Patel (55) the most powerful man in India to-day is responsible for the Party's latest tactics

A barrister of the Middle Temple, Sardar Patel prefers parlour meetings to platform work. In his political armoury he carries three weapons,—biting sarcasm, quiet intrigue, organizing genius.

An unwavering believer in the doctrines of Gandhi, Patel follows his master in every detail. When Gandhi once criticised his moustache he shaved it off—but grew it again later.

In a land of ascetics, he is outstanding for frugality. He breakfasts on a pint of cow's milk and a handful of nuts, for lunch and dinner rarely eats more than a few vegetables, a little home-baked bread, some ghee (clarified butter) and a sip or two of lentil soup. Never will he touch a curry, tea or coffee, alcohol or tobacco."

The statement is bristling with inaccuracies and is based on an erroneous reading of the working of Congress Parliamentary machinery. The writer does not realise that Khare was not the only Indian leader who had left a handsome income to join the Congress. In a country where most of the conservative members of Parliament are representatives of trade and financial interests and instead of defending the cause of the nation serve a particular class this kind of amazement is natural. In England men of Dr. Khare's class would have thought of how best to use Democratic machinery to further their own financial interests. Since Dr. Khare was not following the example of conservative and liberal M. P.s, he was just a "woolly-headed politician

occasionally scolded by Patel "

The story of Patel's cleaning Ahmedabad streets if true is a remarkable journalistic scoop. It shows that Patel started his political career in a spirit of humility and service of the people was his cardinal principle. The sweeping along the way to Fascism is not an exaggeration, but the writer by assuming in the next lines that British Raj is infallible and slightest opposition to it is establishment of a parallel government gives away the impression that the British were infinitely more Fascist in India than Patel.

As a matter of fact Congress did not try to establish parallel government nor thought of such a sinister form of revenge against Federation scheme. The Congress High Command existed long before Provincial Autonomy was introduced. The idea of the coup being a "climax to a series of defiant gestures," is fantastic, as there was no pre meditation in this act of the High Command. It could have never happened if D. Khar had not become rebellious.

The concluding part of the comment illuminates certain traits of Patel's character which have not been very well known to the public. Quite a different note is struck by an American Journal, "The International Review of Missions" which writing sometime latter comments favourably upon the work of the Congress High Command. It says —

'One thing may be said with confidence while recognising that any moment the position may change, a good



start has been made after the preliminary months manœuvring for position and the clarification of issues that resulted from it, the conditions of continued success are present in the spirit of co-operation and of eager service that has been shown by the governors of the provinces, the members of the services and the newly appointed ministers. Speaking generally and keeping clear of the ungrateful task of criticism of details here and there most of the ministers have approached the tasks of administration with humility and courage, and with a determination to deal thoroughly with the real problem of the country. The necessary emphasis on the purely constitutional questions that have been so much debated for many years, some of the greatest of which notably that of the position of the autocratic Indian States in a federal system are still unsolved should not obscure the fact that the Indian Governments in power are using that power for the service of the people. It is at the least a gesture of significance that the Congress Governments are working on a sacrificial bases by their own action the monthly salaries of Ministers have been limited to five hundred rupees (£450 per annum) where there has been any limit of corruption strong steps have been taken to correct it, the Congress High Command exercising at this stage a salutary influence on the Provincial Governments in helping them to maintain a high standard of probity against local forces that might otherwise prove too strong.

How to reconcile the responsibility of each Provincial Congress government to the Congress High Command with the responsibility to the electorate whose votes have put it in office is one of the major problems that the Congress party will have to solve. Meanwhile, however, the Central Congress authority is discharging a most useful and necessary function so that in spite of local difficulties and the fact that some Congressmen are apparently looking for trouble. It may be said that the responsible leaders have shown that they are eager to serve what they believe to be true interests of the country and that they recognise the magnitude of their task.

#### (4)

Shriyut Subhas Chander Bose had very old differences with elderly Congress leaders dating to the time of death of C R Dass, or rather ever since the formation of Swraj Party, for Subhas in lifetime of Dass was one of his ablest and most faithful lieutenants. When Dass passed away these differences began to increase. Subhas Bose who had passed his early youth in company of violent extremists could not reconcile himself to slow ways of Gandhi and his lieutenants. Both at Calcutta and Lahore Congress he spoke in favour of stiffening the anti-British front. This zeal for extremism was reinforced by feelings of anger and disgust with the policy of elderly leaders about Bengal where Subhas Bose thought his rival Sen Gupta was persistently favoured by these leaders who took his side.

in all election disputes. One such dispute had cropped up in the Lahore session too and there was rupture between Pt Moti Lal Nehru and Shriyut Subhas Chander Bose. From that day onwards the differences between Bose and elderly leaders increased. He denounced the suspension of civil disobedience in a manifesto issued from Vienna in 1933. After that we find him crossing swords with Congress Working Committee and its President on the issue of communal award. The inauguration of provincial autonomy and the subsequent election of Bose to Congress presidency at Haripura prevented the old differences from becoming acute. But once having become president and wielded power, Subhas Bose naturally wanted to retain it in his own hands and model the Congress on the lines enunciated by him in his book "The Indian Struggle" and in his statements from Europe while he was there. This move was resisted by other Congress leaders. There was thus no question of "Right" and "Left", which Subhas Bose made the chief plank of his election campaign. This fact has been ably demolished by Shriyut Jawaharlal Nehru, whose grouping of Indian political parties was quoted a little while ago, and we may add that this claim of Shri Subhas Bose does not bear scrutiny. The extreme nationalism of Bose with its continental background, and inspired by visits to Italy and Germany was essentially Rightist while that of Patel and Gandhi belonged to the Centre Right grouping. Since we have compared the organisational

ability of Patel with Hitler, and called him a Parliamentary Dictator, we can best illustrate this point by saying that difference between Patel and Bose was the difference between Herr Hitler and Rudolf Hess, or Hitler and Gregor and Otto Strasser. In other words, it was a difference in methods and about stress, which Bose put on certain matters and never an ideological difference. The discipline, dictatorship, and organisation about which Bose *vexes so eloquent in his writings* with all the enthusiasm of an idealist who had not had the power to put his ideas to test of reality, had been since 1933 tried and perfected by Sardar Patel according to his own ideas and in conformity with the spirit of the times. What Bose imbibed in Europe, merely as a spectator, Patel had learned at home by his life of action, matured earlier than Bose did, and influenced the Congress and Democracy precisely in the manner Bose wanted though Bose might have gone fast. As indeed we learn from his speeches and writings in 1939, he was impatient to introduce his ideas. He failed to grasp the historical role the Congress leaders and especially Patel were playing, and struck them at a time when they were most powerful to hit back, when they had forestalled some of his ideas, and organised the Congress accordingly. His rising was ill timed just as it was of Strasser Brothers, Roehm and Rudolf Hess against Hitler. If he had struck at any other time, the history of Indian National movement might have been different.

As it is, he failed. He chose those weapons for attack on the Congress High Command, which were perfected by nobody better than themselves, namely the charge that the Congress High Command was behaving dictatorially by throwing its weight on the side of Sittaramaya and influencing the delegates to vote for him. The charge was on the face of it true. Gandhi started the ball rolling by issuing on January 17, 1939 a statement favouring the election of Sittaramaya, and he was followed by M. Azad, Vallabhai Patel and others. But it did not lie in the mouth of Shri Subhas Chander Bose to accuse these leaders of dictatorial methods when he was one of those who had in the past in one way or the other contributed to the growth of Dictatorship. When the heads of Nariman and Khare rolled under guillotine, Subhas Bose did not protest. In case of Khare he even defended the Congress Parliamentary Committee's action, and when he said Khare would be shot in Germany, he was speaking out his innermost sentiments—the love of dictatorship which he had imbibed in Germany and Italy.

If it was not dictatorship in case of Khare and Nariman why call dictatorship in his own case? The plea that Robespierre's followers put forward in defence of execution of Danton that it was the same public safety committee of which once he was an able spokesman and had Marat, Lafayette and Girondists executed; but which he now maligned because it sat in judgment on

him, the same plea could be put forward by followers of Patel. It is quite another matter that interests of France demanded that such an execution should not have taken place, just as in interests of National Unity it would have been better if both sides had followed the advice of Jawaharlal Nehru and made a compromise. But it was no good charging the High Command of Dictatorship, when Bose himself wanted a much more ruthless brand of it and had aided the High Command in setting it up over eight provinces.

In this connection the stand of the Socialists both at Tripuri and after was eminently sensible. Marxists as they were they had no hesitation in seeing the Bose High Command dispute in its historic perspective. They felt it harmful to the National interests to wage a civil war inside the Congress to gain hold of leadership. The phase for that sort of action was either past or it had not come. The action of Subhas Bose was inopportune and as we have said resulted in failure. On the part of High Command one does not find any desire to check the conflict from spreading once it had started. Subhas Bose had no doubt thrown a challenge which if successful would have meant for them a surrender of the house, which they had so assiduously built. It was no easy matter to change boats in midstream, but one might invite the crew of the other boat to bring the boat nearer and row as companions, rather than let it take a different course and attack your boat from behind.

Subhas Bose in the course of his statements said that Acharya Narendra Dev should be set up as a candidate. That was a way out of the impasse. But neither side took the suggestion seriously and it fell through. One final word may be said about the attitude of followers of Bose. From the tone of the Bengal press and its leaders it was clear that they wanted to use Patel as a scapegoat. Afraid of frontal attack on Gandhi and aware of the fact that if Bose was pitched against Gandhi, and the people left to decide the issue, Gandhi would be triumphant, they resorted to a flanking movement attacking the Congress High Command and Patel in particular. These attacks and the exhibition of unbridled mob violence at Calcutta meeting of A.I.C.C. were unworthy of a province which has given to the world Tagore, Jagdish Chander Bose, Bipin Pal and C. R. Dass. They were bad tactics and showed bad taste. It was fortunate that Patel stayed away from Calcutta meeting. If he had gone there he must have become a target of perverted extremism of some Bengali youth.

Such being the state of feelings in Bengal, retaliation from the side of Patel or his followers was natural. They were as much careless about the consequences to the country as followers of Bose were.

### (5)

The harm suffered by India's struggle for freedom became clear after the outbreak of war. From Calcutta onwards Subhas Bose drifted away from Congress

and on the outbreak of war, we find that he was pro-Nazi, while the Congress was anti-Nazi. Bengal became gradually an outcast province, its Congress committee was deprived of central leadership and affiliation with the Congress. India lost loyalty of a province, which became as bitter towards the rest of the country for "discourteous treatment to the Bengal leader", as Catalonia was towards the rest of Spain before being given autonomy.

Jawahar Lal Nehru, when he returned from China, was alone able to stem the rot that had set in the Congress. He was assisted by Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad who were also the members of the Congress Sub-Committee for war. The Sub-Committee was to open negotiations with British Government. It held some meetings and then Nehru, Azad and Gandhi saw the Viceroy. The meetings bore no fruit.

In the Congress itself, that is as it was after the defection of Subhas Bose, there were differences. While Gandhi advised the Poles not to resist the Germans, the Congress passed resolution condemning German aggression and expressing sympathy with those engaged in fighting it. Some members of the Working Committee favoured Gandhi, while Sardar Patel, like Maulana Azad and one or two others, was always able to adjust himself to new circumstances, although he described himself as follower of Gandhi. As a man who had ruled over nine Congress provinces and often



resorted to violence to maintain law and order he knew how difficult it was not to use armies against international gangsters when they had been used against internal gangsters and enemies of public peace. Speaking about war and the Working Committee resolution at Raipur Political Conference on January 20, 1940, he affirmed that the Working Committee had given a right lead to the country. The war was due to commercial rivalry and lust for imperialism. It would change the map of the entire world.

Gandhi's separation from the Congress could not last for long. The Congress could express a view different from Gandhi's, but it could not fight the battle without Gandhi. So naturally there was some synthesis of the views of both parties, whenever the need for a struggle arose. Gandhi had still hold over people and his weapon of non-violence for fight against the British was still the accepted creed of majority of Congressmen. He returned to command at Ramgarh.

The Ramgarh Congress made Gandhi general of the Congress. He was made responsible for getting India's demand of self-determination accepted by the British government. Gandhi carried on a series of meetings with the Viceroy and wanted him to concede to begin with the right of freedom of speech and freedom of press about anti-war propaganda. The negotiations dragged on and people became restless. Gandhi and Patel's methods of action differ. But in this case the warrior was content to wait. He stood by his chief

and said that Gandhi would not hesitate to give marching orders if he found that the conditions for starting struggle were fulfilled. But as the spirit of violence was abroad and people drew inspiration from foreign ideas the Congress had to pause for a while." The reference to foreign ideas was of course towards the Communists who were all out for struggle, against the Imperialist war. Sardar Patel who has been never tolerant of Communist ideas was on this occasion particularly annoyed with them. They were trying to steal thunder over the Congress, by their forward action. They were playing a role which daily brought them into clash with government and thus made them martyres in eyes of people! Surely they could not have the monopoly of anti-war activities! Speaking a little later on Communism, Sardar Patel attacked them with greater force. "Communism, would never grow in India," he said. "There might be few individuals enamoured of the doctrine of Communism, but the masses could never be converted to this doctrine." The secret of this go slow policy of Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee became out at its Delhi meeting in July 1940. It was decided in that meeting that an offer of help be made to Britain, in case a National government was formed at centre. It could of course be armed help and not moral support. This created confusion in minds of people and some thought that the Congress had abandoned Gandhi and broken away from him. Actually there was no break.

Gandhi remained the general. The Congress Working Committee was not wedded to Gandhian Non-Violence in its entirety. They could sometime deviate from it and still owe allegiance to him. Patel was quite clear on this point. Speaking on Delhi resolution he declared that it was a sincere offer of help to Britain and Britain could appreciate it. About Gandhi he said that there was no split in Congress. All were loyal to its leader.

And again after the A.I.C.C. had ratified the Delhi resolution, he said.—

“During the short experience of administration of 2½ years in the provinces, on several occasions we felt the need and had to requisition the military. Mahatma Gandhi did not like this and said so plainly. Our not being able to follow Mahatma Gandhi to the full extent in this respect does not imply that we are second to any one in regard to our respect and loyalty to him, and if this House passed a resolution pledging its support to the principle of unadulterated Non-Violence in all circumstances, I will be the happiest person. But if we cannot go to that extent, it is better for us to be frank and say so.”

This resolution was opposed by the Socialists as well as the Communists who thought that it meant striking a bargain with British Imperialism. They declared that it was useless to expect anything from Great Britain. And so it happened. The resolution evoked no response from Britain. Britain which was

gagging the press at home and curtailing liberties of people, could not be expected to recant overnight and give freedom to India

This was realised by the Congress in its Bombay A. I. C. C. meeting of September 15. The A. I. C. C. decided that as the Delhi offer had not been accepted by Britain it had lapsed and the Congress had come back to Ramgarh resolution.

Some time after the Bombay session the struggle was launched by Gandhi. The Government began repression, Nehru was sentenced to four years' jail and several other leaders were arrested.

Patel was arrested on November 18. Throughout the winter months individual civil disobedience continued and by the spring almost all the leaders of Congress were clapped in prison. The British Government which had tried to crush the Congress by mass arrests, fines and convictions relaxed somewhat when the prisons became full to their utmost capacity. The outbreak of Russo German war also necessitated a change of tactics in India. There were many who looked with disgust and horror at German invasion of Russia and there was hope that relations between British and India might improve. These hopes were raised high, when gradually Patel, Bhubhai Desai, Azad and Nehru were released. But although the British Government had changed its attitude towards Congress after it had been pressed by about M P's at home to do so, there was no real effort

tion to the fullest extent. The students would be asked to leave their studies, the lawyers their legal work, in short there was to be a nation-wide struggle.

That was a typical Patel touch. He had sent the first salvo flying into the enemy ranks, while the real fight was yet to begin. It created no little confusion among the bureaucracy, who were left guessing what that struggle would be which would end in a week. But the above statement pales into insignificance before the thunderous speech of the Sardar at Bombay meeting of the A. I. C. C. on August 8.

"If America and England are thinking that they could fight their enemies from India, without the co-operation of forty million people of India, they were foolish. It must dawn on people that this war was a people's war and they should fight for their country and their freedom. As long as this feeling was non-existent, no amount of propaganda through the newspapers and the radio could rouse the people to supreme effort.

For three years the Congress was scrupulously adhering to their policy of non-embarrassment, and did nothing, even under provocation. But this attitude was not appreciated and Britain thought that conditions would remain the same throughout. Now the enemy was at their door and they could not risk being idle any longer."

He warned his audience against putting any faith in the professions of Japan about their good intentions

# Five Remarkable Biographies

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*The Sentinel of the East* (2nd Imp.) by Durlab Singh.

"It is no exaggeration to say that the book will serve the needs of those who are thinking of drinking deep at Tagorean fountains of light and learning. Its get-up is excellent and on the whole it is remarkably well written."

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Bombay, July 12, 1942.—*Illustrated Weekly of India*

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—*Amrita Bazar Patrika*

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—*The Hindustan Review*

We take this opportunity of recommending this little book which we are sure will win general appreciation.

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—*Social Welfare*

Price 2/-

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"The Rebel President is a nice biographical account of the Indian national leader Sjt. Subhas Chandra Bose.

Subhas has disappeared but his ideals and gospel still remain for the public to understand. Durlab Singh has tried to explain the truth of Subhas' ideals in a popular way and I believe he has been thoroughly successful. The book, it seems, has been much appreciated by the public and in barely four months' time a second edition had to be published.

I recommend this book to every student of Indian politics."

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